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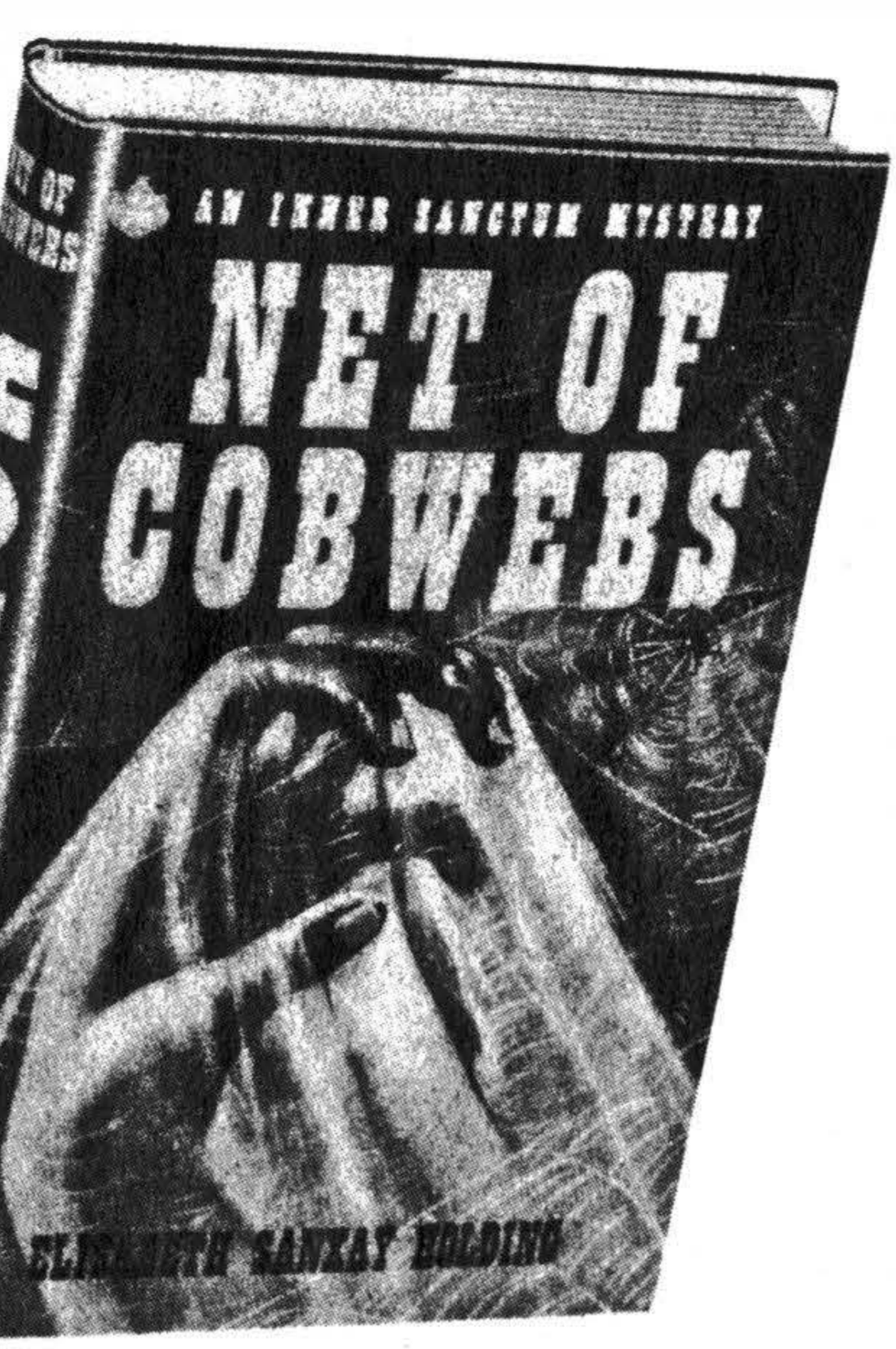

AN INNER SANCTUM MYSTERY

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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You've probably seen movie adventures of the Falcon "based on the character created by Michael Arlen." (Some of the screenplays were written by our old friends, Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice.) Well, here's the short story that started the whole thing. So far as your Editor has been able to find out, it's the one and only Gay Falcon story Michael Arlen ever wrote. Thus, from short stories long sagas grow . . .

One curious point: It is rare indeed for any story, long or short, to come off the Hollywood assembly line without suffering a B-change, rich and strange. Michael Arlen's "Gay Falcon" proved no exception to the cinematic rule. In the original version, as you will see, Gay Falcon is a hard-boiled, sardonic detective — not the man, as Mr. Arlen tells us, "who would have succeeded in politics, where charm of manner is said to be an advantage." In the movie "adaptations," Gay Falcon emerges, picture after picture, as a charming and romantic roguel Oh, well, life is real, life is earnest . . .

GAY FALCON

by MICHAEL ARLEN

Now of this man who called himself Gay Falcon many tales are told, and this is one of them.

It is told how, late one night not long ago, a pretty lady awoke to find a man in her bedroom, and how this outrage on her privacy started a train of most peculiar events which finally ended in as sensational a murder as you could wish to see.

But let us take one thing at a time.

Her dreamless sleep so rudely shattered, the pretty lady blinked in the sudden light which the intruder, behaving in a manner quite unsuitable in a decent burglar, had switched on.

"What is it?" she cried. "What do you want?"

She was surprised, not frightened. It took more than a man to frighten this pretty lady, as many a man had found. Flinging her bed-jacket about her shoulders, her famous blue eyes, now so entirely devoid of the desire to please that photographers would have recognized her only with difficulty, regarded the stranger with surprise and contempt. But such treatment appeared only to nourish his disagreeable assurance.

"Lady, be good," he said. "Don't ring. Don't telephone."

It should be pointed out that the tall intruder must indeed have lacked all sensibility, for even when addressing the lady he did not remove his hat, which was of weathered felt, the colour of rain on Piccadilly, and worn at an angle over his left eye which might have been called debonair anywhere but in a lady's bedroom.

"You are easy to look at," he said thoughtfully, "even without the make-up. Easy on the eye."

While these compliments were vulgar and ill-timed, they were deserved in full measure. The lady made a very pretty picture. Her bed-jacket matched her bed-spread, which was of white satin fringed with white ermine, while everything about her — hair, eyes, features, complexion — was of the very best and most attractive quality obtainable for women over twenty-five but under thirty.

But this lady's beauty can need no description when it is revealed that her name was Mrs. Temple, Diana Temple, of London, Paris, and New York, one of the ten or maybe ten thousand best-dressed women in the world, excluding China and the Solomon Islands.

Of the fellow Temple, her husband, nothing can be said since nothing is known, apart from the fact that he had a brother. Once upon a time this brother had run away to sea, while Temple had married Diana, and neither was ever heard of again.

But the rude intruder made no attempt to conceal the fact that Diana Temple was no more to him than just another woman. As she swiftly stretched out a hand to her bedside table, he more swiftly put the telephone and bell-push out of her reach.

"Lady, be calm," he said. "This is the one occasion when Diana Temple is not going to do what she likes with a man. I don't want to get tough with you — so be good, my pretty."

Her lovely eyes widened with frank curiosity as she stared up at the man's dark saturnine face. He was tall, his clothes were as you like it for an old suit casually worn, his face was long and lean and dark, and his eyes were deep hard shadows.

"You are a strange burglar, I think," she said, "and somehow . . ."

"Somehow?" he said, and flicked off his hat.

"Why," she cried, "I've met you before!"

"Yes," he said. "We slept together through Lady Taura's dinner-party two weeks ago."

"We danced together, too," she said. "I remember — Gay Falcon! Your name is Gay Falcon."

"I have others, equally improbable."

"Tell me frankly, Mr. Falcon — do you enjoy being such a contemptible beast?"

"I enjoy the company of a woman of courage, Mrs. Temple. It relieves me that you take so lightly the fact that you are going to be robbed."

When she smiled you saw at once why men, who were prudent with their wives, pressed pearls and diamonds on Diana Temple.

"But," she smiled, "I am not going to be robbed. How silly of you to be so recognizable, Mr. Falcon. You *can* rob me, of course. But you will be arrested tomorrow."

"We shall see," said the man who called himself Gay Falcon. "Don't you remember something else about Lady Taura's party apart from the fact that we danced together?"

"Dear me," she said, staring, "her

emerald! Of course — her lovely emerald — which was found to be missing next morning." She measured the man with a cold and detached curiosity which might have mortified a less assured scoundrel. "You are a clever thief, Mr. Gay Falcon."

"It was nice work, certainly. Of course, the stone is not worth the sum Lady Taura will collect from the insurance in due course — but still, it was nice work."

"I am glad you are pleased, Mr. Falcon. It must be pleasant to make such a success of one's chosen profession."

"I haven't said I stole it, Mrs. Temple."

The saturnine stranger unsmilingly surveyed the spacious bedroom.

Mrs. Temple lost nothing of her poise when she saw that the thief's eyes had come to rest on her dressing-table. There, on a small tray of crimson velvet, like bright fruit fallen from the trees of an ambitious maiden's dreams, lay the necklace of rubies and bracelets of rubies and clips of rubies that she had worn at dinner.

"You won't really mind my taking those," he said, "since they are so well insured."

"Since you know so much, Mr. Falcon, you will know that the insurance cannot repay me for their romantic and sentimental value."

The man glanced at her with a queer cold smile, and Mrs. Temple felt really uneasy for the first time.

"In that case," he said, "I won't take them. Observe my big heart."

She heard herself, with infinite surprise, laughing unsteadily.

"Then you must go away empty-handed, Mr. Falcon, for everything else is at my bank."

The tall man's eyes had come to rest on the only picture in the austere room. This was a small Italian primitive, the colour still bright on the cracked wood, of the Virgin Mary with the Child, and it was let into the wall just beside the bed behind the bedside table.

And as the man approached the primitive set into the wall, Mrs. Temple, the calm and remote Mrs. Temple, stared at him with suddenly uncontrollable terror.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "No — please!"

"I fancy," he said, reaching out a hand past the telephone to the lower right corner of the primitive, "I fancy, Mrs. Temple, that you won't tell the police about what I am going to do now."

She fought him with all her strength. Quite silently, but for bitter little sighs of feminine despair, her lovely features distorted with fear, she beat her arms frantically against him in a vain attempt to prevent him from opening the little secret safe in the wall.

But when she had done all she could, she regained her practised dignity. She did not look to see what he was taking from the secret safe. She lay very still and stared up at the ceiling with wide open eyes that seemed to be counting some ghosts

that walked there.

He looked back at her from the door, and was about to say something. Then he saw how she lay still and looked to be counting ghosts that walked across the ceiling, and he went out without a word.

She was the most frightened woman he had ever seen, and it was interesting to wonder why, since it was not of him that she was so frightened.

On the following morning the activities of the man who called himself Gay Falcon were surprising in a simple burglar.

Passing through the imposing doors of a very large new building on Pall Mall, known to all the world as the headquarters of Universal & Allied Assurance, he was immediately taken up to the handsome boardroom. It was just one minute after noon.

Nine gentlemen appeared to have been awaiting his entrance. Of these a few were directors of Universal & Allied, while others represented important firms of underwriters and assessors. The sulky features of the ninth gentleman were recognizable to readers of popular newspapers as being those of Chief-Inspector Poss of Scotland Yard. As he sat at the board-table, he made no secret of the fact that he disapproved strongly of his present situation and was quite unprepared to change his mind in the near future.

The man called Falcon had with him a small but evidently well-filled leather satchel. He slid this with an expert shove down the length of the long table to the handsome grey-haired gentleman who sat at its head.

"There you are, Mr. Hammersley. In the last few years your people and other underwriters have paid out close on £100,000 in claims on the lost or stolen jewellery represented by that little lot."

It was only Chief-Inspector Poss who examined the jewellery with any degree of close attention. The others merely glanced at it, some with inexpert eyes, while their interest was centred on the tall lean figure of Falcon.

"If that is the case," said Mr. Hammersley, "as it very probably is, your commission of five per cent. will come to £5,000, which is very nice money, Mr. Falcon."

"When you hired me, Mr. Hammersley, did you think you were hiring a nursemaid?"

"Oh, we are not complaining," said a large, smiling, ruddy man.

"Thank you very much," said Gay Falcon. It was obvious that he was not a man who would have succeeded in politics, where charm of manner is said to be an advantage.

"And now," said the smiling, ruddy man, "perhaps we can hear how you have managed to succeed so quickly where the police have so consistently failed."

Falcon's hard unsmiling eyes flicked over the Chief-Inspector who, bent over the table, was still examining the jewellery. Then his gaze went back to the large ruddy man with the twin-

kling blue eyes. This was Mr. Harvey Morgan, always known as "Chappie" Morgan, a very successful financier and popular sportsman. It was apparent from Falcon's expression that he thought more amiably of Chappie Morgan than of his associates.

"Well, what's your story?" said handsome Mr. Hammersley sharply.

"My father was a dentist in Leicester, and my mother died when I was a child. Shortly afterwards I decided to leave home and become an engine-driver, but owing to ——"

"We asked you, Mr. Falcon, for your story about this recovered jewellery."

Chappie Morgan gave a loud bark of laughter.

"Listen, Hammersley," said the man called Falcon, "you people hired me because the police had failed to justify reasonable suspicions that underwriters were being cleverly robbed. I have confirmed your suspicions and returned part of the jewellery. I am not a policeman. I am not a story-teller. I am a man who makes a living by keeping his mouth shut. The money due to me should be paid into my account at Barclays Bank, Piccadilly Branch."

Chief-Inspector Poss looked across the table very steadily.

"That won't do, Falcon."

"Mister Falcon, Chief-Inspector. What won't do?"

"Gentlemen," said the Chief-Inspector to the board, "I told you a month ago that it was highly irregular to give a free hand in this matter to a man like this man Falcon —"

"Mr. Flatfoot," said Gay Falcon, "one more crack from you and I shall give the whole story to the newspapers, and then you and your efficient detectives will be looking for jobs as film-extras."

"Better be a good boy, Poss," grinned Chappie Morgan.

"I am not easily frightened, gentlemen. But now you will appreciate why I warned you against engaging *Mister* Falcon. This stuff is stolen jewellery, some of it very famous jewellery. And we know for a fact that not one little bit of it has passed through the hands of any fence in England. You are taking a grave risk, gentlemen. If we do not hear from this man Falcon how he has managed to succeed where the police have failed, you share with him the risk of being charged with aiding and abetting a receiver of stolen jewellery."

"Quit kidding," said Falcon. "It's their property, isn't it, since they have paid all claims on it? Try arresting them for receiving back their own property, and see how you like it."

"But *you* can be charged, *Mister* Falcon, for all sorts of misdemeanours, I make no doubt. Now behave yourself and help the police by telling me how you recovered this property."

"Brains," said Falcon. "Naughty boy, where are yours?"

The Chief-Inspector's grim face had reddened, and he was about to retort in a manner unworthy of the high traditions of Scotland Yard, when Mr. Hammersley intervened with

practised authority.

"I am afraid, Chief-Inspector, that while we must agree with you that Mr. Falcon's attitude is highly irregular, we cannot encourage you to take any action against him. It was with your knowledge that we engaged him to recover this jewellery, which the police had failed to find for two years."

"And now," said Chappie Morgan, "Scotland Yard is angry because Falcon won't give away his little secret."

"The law," said Chief-Inspector Poss, with commendable restraint, "does not acknowledge secrets in respect of other people's stolen property. This man Falcon's position requires investigation." He picked up a jewel from amongst the heap on the table. "Now here is the famous Taura emerald, which Lady Taura reported as stolen or missing two weeks ago ——"

"Insured at £9,000," said someone.

"Yes. And here it is, recovered. But how? It was stolen at or after a ball given by Lady Taura. And you were there, *Mister* Falcon."

"Does the fact that I dance better than you do, Chief-Inspector, mean that I am a criminal? Now let me tell you all something. These insurance claims for lost and stolen jewellery from society people over the last two years and more have been part of a very clever racket. I want to find out who is behind this racket. When I do, I'll maybe talk. In fact, I promise to talk. Good day to you, gentlemen. Good day, Chief-Inspector."

"You are asking for trouble, Falcon. Remember, there is an unsolved murder somewhere behind these thefts — that of Stella Bowman last year. I warn you again, Falcon."

"It's years and years, Chief-Inspector, since I burst out crying because a policeman didn't like me."

Now it is on record that no well-known beauty can long survive the rigorous life of being a well-known beauty day in and day out if she does not acquire the courageous gift of being able to "put off" engagements at more or less the last minute. Mrs. X regrets that she is unable to dine because she has a headache and is going to bed with a boiled egg. Mrs. X regrets that she cannot lunch to-day because her doctor has forbidden her to go out.

They always sound like lies. They usually are lies, but people are eager to forgive lies who will find the truth intolerable. For while it is true that people do not like to be "put off," it is also true that those people who are by nature liable to be "put off" invariably live to fight another day for yet another engagement with the same inconsiderate guest.

Therefore Mrs. Temple had little hesitation, that very afternoon, in telephoning to Lady Soda's house and regretting that she could not dine that evening with Sir Theodore and Lady Soda owing to this and that.

The fact that she was dining with the man who called himself Gay Fal-

con, who had telephoned that afternoon in the most casual manner imaginable, was nobody's business but her own. Anyway, Mrs. Temple knew, for she was a student of worldliness in all its nasty little niceties, that Sir Theodore and Lady Soda would inevitably invite her again.

She met Mr. Falcon at a small restaurant near Jermyn Street which had recently become well known to thinking men of the wealthier sort for its serious attitude in matters of importance. As always, she wore her slender cool beauty with that faint air of detached amusement which is the natural gift of women born to enchant others but never to deceive themselves.

Mr. Falcon had taken care they should not be overheard by engaging a corner table. The black-and-white effect of his dinner-jacket emphasized his dark saturnine face and deep eyes and greying hair. It also became apparent to a close observer that he knew how to laugh at many things.

She said: "Dear me, for an ugly man you are really quite good-looking."

"Just wait," he said, "till you get the low-down on my kind heart as well, and then you will wonder where I have been all your life. I haven't ordered any dinner, since you never know what a pretty woman will eat, if at all. Have some melon. Have some caviare. Have a steak and onions. Have some grouse. Diana Temple, you are a very pretty woman. Have what you like."

"How nice it is," she said, over dinner, "to be with someone with whom I don't have to pretend anything. Dear me, I am a thief. I am a bad woman. Now you know about me — what about you? What are you? Who are you?"

"And why," he smiled darkly, "did I do to you what I did last night?"

"Yes, why?"

"Diana Temple, I am a man who has done many things. I have been a soldier, a gambler, a secret agent, an airplane salesman, a white hunter, a purser, a husband, a co-respondent, a war-correspondent, a long-distance swimmer, a professional dancer, a good salmon-fisherman. I have no rheumatism, no patience, and no money. For further information apply to Scotland Yard for free booklet on the man called Gay Falcon."

"No money? Then how do you make a living?"

"By engaging in dangerous enterprises — and I've not been killed — yet."

"But *I* am not a dangerous enterprise, Mr. Falcon. Why did you engage yourself in my business?"

"Mrs. Temple, some more grouse?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Falcon."

"Then just one more potato? What is one more potato to a figure like yours? Have I told you that I was once married to a woman in New York with a figure just like yours, but she ——"

She said: "Mr. Fortune, why did you, who engage in dangerous enterprises, pick on me?"

Over the rim of his wine-glass his sardonic eyes, now unsmiling, regarded her fair face intently. Her gaze did not waver, but that meant little to a man who knew from experience that liars and thieves and killers can look you straighter in the eyes than many an honest man.

"Then I shall ask you a question, too," he said. "Why were you so infernally frightened last night?"

"Frightened?" She smiled with a wavering uncertainty that made her beauty poignant. "But isn't it natural — when a strange man bursts into a woman's ——"

"You were not," he pointed out, "frightened of me."

Her eyes fell slowly, and she seemed to be counting the little bright bubbles in her wine-glass.

"There is someone in your life, Diana Temple, of whom you are very frightened. For you love life, and you are frightened for your life. And it is because I am out to find and catch that someone, that this is a dangerous enterprise."

Very still, her eyes grave and absorbed, she said nothing. Then she shivered a very little. She did not look at him.

"I don't want," she whispered to the last bursting bubble in her glass, "to die."

"It would be a pity, I agree. Let me tell you a story, Mrs. Temple. There are a number of wealthy and respectable women in this world who are now and then in need of hard cash. Perhaps they have lost too much at racing or at cards, or owe their brokers more than they can pay. Perhaps husbands or trustees simply will not pay up again.

"They are not women who would willingly do anything criminal. Looking around for money, they see only their jewellery. They think of selling a ring or bracelet, but if they try to sell to a well-known jeweller, they fear their husbands will find out or their credit will be damaged, and from an obscure merchant they can hope only for a very poor bargain.

"There is the insurance. Fine jewels belonging to individuals are invariably insured at their replaceable value and not at what you or I could sell them for at second-hand. Therefore they will get very much more from the insurance than from selling the stuff, even if they knew how.

"But the very fact that insurance companies can exist and thrive is due to something fundamental in human nature — that the vast majority of people are honest, that a small number would be faintly dishonest if not frightened of the law, while only a very small percentage are really dishonest.

"So the respectable women I speak of would not dream of cheating the underwriters by throwing a ruby into a lake, while some would like to but daren't for fear of breaking down when answering the searching questions of practised investigators.

"Then one day along comes the answer to their troubles. Let us say that a Mrs. de Courcy Fish, well-known to readers of unimportant

papers as an important person, owes her bookmaker a thousand quid. She daren't tell her old man, because he is hard up himself and she has promised never to gamble again. Her bookmaker is getting nasty, like in the story-books. And then one day a voice on the telephone tells her just what to do to raise the wind.

"'Mrs. de Snooks Fish,' says the voice, 'don't worry about your debts. Yes, I know all about you. All you have to do is to claim the £1,500 insurance on that ruby ring you have lost.'

"'My ruby!' she cries. 'But I haven't lost it. I've never lost anything.'

"'Oh yes, you have, madam. You have lost your ruby tomorrow night at Delsarto's, where you and your husband have supper so often after the theatre. You were sitting — tomorrow night — at your usual table, and somehow owing to a slight scratch on your finger your ring was bothering you. So you put it, or you thought you did, beside your plate and — really very stupidly — forgot it there for a few minutes while you got up to dance. Or if your husband didn't want to dance tomorrow night you went to powder your nose. Anyway, some ten minutes or so after you got back, you missed the ring, but being uncertain whether you really had taken it off or whether it had dropped off your finger while dancing and so on and forget this talk and I am so sorry you have lost your ruby tomorrow night and good day to you, madam.'

"That, Diana Temple, is more or less how this insurance racket started. One clever thing about it was that the people who put in claims for lost or stolen jewellery had never or very seldom lost anything before, and so were and are rated as first-class risks, and another clever thing was that the women concerned really did delude themselves that they really had lost or mislaid or dropped the stuff, as indeed they had, in one way.

"That is my story, Diana Temple — and your story, too."

Watching her, he did not help her light her cigarette. Carefully, she blew out the match, and for a long minute stared at its burnt tip.

She said: "How did you find me out, Gay Falcon?"

"I have been interested in you for some time. I wondered how you had enough money to live and dress as you do, since your husband disappeared years ago ——"

"My uncle ——" she said.

"My uncle my eye, beautiful. Then I watched you at Lady Taura's party. She has a large income, but I happen to know she has to pay her broker £5,000 soon or be sold out of her American securities. She had her emerald at dinner. She had it at midnight. She had *not* got it after she had gone into the library for a gossip with the Home Secretary — though she didn't seem to notice her loss until the next morning. Well, a hostess has much on her mind. But I saw the emerald, and left it where it had ap-

parently slipped from her finger between the cushions of the sofa on which she had been chatting with the Home Secretary — and on which, later on, you were flirting with that young ass Chubby Wimpole."

She looked at him steadily.

"You win," she said. "What are you going to do? Why haven't you told the police already?"

"Because you are only a frightened minnow, beautiful. What good will it do to put you behind bars? I want to catch the shark. I am hired to catch a big bad shark. And so I shall catch him, or know why."

She was intent on crushing out her half-smoked cigarette.

"Don't!" she whispered. "Leave him alone." Suddenly, never looking at him, she spoke very quickly. "Yes, I am frightened. He is a killer. Leave him alone, Gay Falcon. I warn you. He doesn't know yet — I dare *not* tell him — that you have taken the stuff from me. He is retiring from business next week — then he comes to collect my lot — it's less than half of what there is in all — and starts on his travels — a retired and rich business man — to South America. Leave him alone, Gay Falcon. There's only one life."

"What about yours? What shall you do?"

She smiled faintly.

"Diana Temple," she said, "has taken a suite at the Ritz in Paris as from tomorrow. Perhaps you will dine with me there very soon, Mr. Falcon? Yes, I am running away — from fear, crime, everything." Her fingers, diving quickly into her vanity-bag, as quickly slipped a small packet of tissue-paper into his hand. "You missed this last night. Put it among your collection. Then you have done all you were hired to do, and can take a holiday."

Shielded by the table-cloth, he examined the clip in his palm — a magnificent square emerald set in baguette diamonds.

"Lost or stolen," he said, "two nights ago at the Avalons' dance in Belgrave Square. I see. Thank you, Diana Temple." He tossed the tissue-paper on to the table, and slipped the clip into his pocket. "Now go home, beautiful. And I hope you mean what you say about running away. I don't like your friend, and if he should think the police are after you and that you might talk, then it will be a poor look-out for your dressmakers."

Her clear wide eyes, still poignant with hidden fear, regarded him thoughtfully.

"Why don't you," she said slowly, as though each word was an ordeal, "why don't you try to force his name out of me?"

"Because I have guessed it. Because I don't want you to be bumped off before you dine with me again — I'm particular about women, and I prefer them alive. Because I want better evidence than my guess or your word. Because it's bed-time. Good night, Diana Temple."

She almost snatched up her bag and, as though she could not trust

herself to say another word, left him very quickly. Had she glanced back from the restaurant-door, she would have surprised a look of queer anxiety on his usually saturnine face. The man called Gay Falcon had never in his life made a secret of the fact that he wished pretty women well, no matter what they might wish for him.

Not ten minutes later he let himself into his flat in St. James's Square nearby. He showed no surprise at finding two visitors comfortably awaiting him in the sitting-room. One of them was Chief-Inspector Poss, and the other was a beefy type whom even a blind thief would instantly have recognized as a detective.

"We rang the bell," said Poss innocently, "but as nobody answered and the door was ajar, we just came in to wait for you. This is Detective-Sergeant Daisy, but his name does him an injustice."

Gay Falcon, still standing, looked slowly around, glanced into his bedroom, then looked at the Chief-Inspector with a smile in his deep hard eyes which would have done credit to a tiger suddenly confronted by a man with a niblick.

"You've got some cheek, Poss," he said, amiably enough. "I am sorry you have had your search for nothing."

"Not quite nothing," said the Chief-Inspector with satisfaction. "You will have to explain these in due course." He took three passports from an inside pocket and held them up. "Three passports, one for a man of independent means called Gay Stanhope Falcon, one for a soldier called Colonel Rock, who looks quite a bit like you, and one for a journalist with an address in Paris called Spencer Pott, who would be your twin brother but for his moustache. You will have to explain these, *Mister* Gay Stanhope Falcon."

Detective-Sergeant Daisy appeared to have formed a high opinion of his superior's sense of humour, and Falcon had to wait for his rugged laughter to die down before he said:

"You will have to do your own explaining tomorrow morning, Chief-Inspector, when you get a telephone call, as I fancy you will, from General Icelin. But don't let me interfere with your evening out. What do you want?"

The Chief-Inspector was looking at him thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Falcon, I shan't be a bit surprised to find that you are or have been military-intelligence. You've got that nasty look back of your eyes which one associates with M.I. I'll give these passports back at one word from the right quarter, don't worry about that. What *is* worrying me is your attitude about this jewellery affair. Look here, Falcon, I'd much rather have you working with me than against me or on your own."

Falcon, his hands in his pockets, looked unsmilingly from one to the other of the two burly detectives.

"You didn't break into my flat to hand me a bouquet, Poss. What

brought you here? A telephone message — about an hour ago?"

Both the Chief-Inspector and his subordinate started with surprise.

"We'll go into that later, Falcon. Now listen, and take it easy. We've got to search you. You can refuse. Then you come along with us and we'll search you all according to law. But it will be simpler if you allow us to search you here."

Falcon's eyes went to the telephone for a quick second. Then he said: "Go ahead, but be quick. You and I are going to be busy tonight."

The two detectives, with Falcon's help, were quickly finished, finding nothing more than any man's usual belongings.

Poss sighed. "It was too good to be true. We received information to the effect that you would have in your possession the emerald and diamond clip stolen at Lady Avalon's dance the other night."

Falcon looked deadly serious. He snapped, "If you had found it, what would you have had to do?"

The Chief-Inspector stared, puzzled by Falcon's expression. "As far as anyone would know — anyone who might not know that we *might* be on your side — we would have to hold you pending full inquiries. You'd be charged first, of course." He added sharply, "What's up, Falcon? What's on your mind?"

Falcon said: "Wait a minute." Pacing up and down, he appeared to come to a conclusion, and stood facing the Chief-Inspector.

"Poss, the man who tried to frame me tonight didn't think the charge would stick — he is too clever for that. But he *did* think it would keep me quiet for a few days — so that he could get clear of the country. He is frightened. And he is dangerous."

"You mean," Poss said, "that these insurance thefts are tied to ——"

"They are tied to murder. You were reminding me this morning of that pretty Mrs. Bowman who was found strangled in her flat one night last year. She was going to give certain information about stolen jewellery to Scotland Yard the next day, wasn't she?"

Poss said: "Apart from just one blurred fingerprint on a tumbler, we didn't get within a thousand miles of whoever killed Stella Bowman."

Falcon said: "Get this. If you do exactly as I say for the next hour or two you will put handcuffs on the owner of that fingerprint, the brain behind this insurance racket, and the killer of another pretty woman like the well-known Mrs. Bowman."

The Chief-Inspector reddened. "Another? What's this, Falcon? Who is it?"

"Take it easy, Poss. This murder won't come off. Now will you do as I say?"

The Chief-Inspector, glancing at his subordinate, said "Go ahead, Falcon. You'll back me up, Daisy? We can but try. This chap Falcon knows a hell of a sight more about this than we do — perhaps more than is good for him. It certainly would be nice

to get that Bowman strangler."

They sat in watchful silence while Falcon dialled a number. When he heard Diana Temple's voice, he said:

"Listen, beautiful, your little play didn't come off."

She gave a little shivering gasp.

"I know," he said softly, "I know how frightened you are. Listen ——"

"But if," she gasped, "he finds out that the police aren't holding you, and that you have given them my name and that they are going to question me, he will come and ——"

"The police are here with me, after searching me without success. You should have told me at dinner that he had instructed you to frame me. Then I could have taken steps to see to your safety. But it's not too late now, if you will do what you are told."

"But — but what *did* you do with the clip?"

"You will find it at the bottom of your bag, where I slipped it back. I trust nobody, sweetheart. Now — for your own safety — will you follow my instructions to the letter?"

"Yes — oh, Gay Falcon, yes! I can't face him — when he finds that you really are after him."

"You will have to face him, Diana, because he will come to see you very soon. He has a key, of course? I am going to let him know in the next few minutes that the police are to question you in the morning."

"But you mustn't — you can't! You're telling him to kill me, like he did ——"

"Be calm, lady. You will be better protected than Stella Bowman. Now do as you are told. Go to bed immediately."

"Yes? And?"

"That's all. Just go to bed. And wait. Just wait. Read a nice thriller, if you like."

She laughed unsteadily. "I thought better — of you — than to make fun of my fears."

"Don't worry — I am going to cure you of your fears for ever. Trust in me, beautiful."

He snapped down the receiver and turned to the Chief-Inspector, who was glaring at him.

"You are risking a woman's life, Falcon — even though she is an accomplice ——"

"One moment, Poss. If you are going to arrest this woman — and you've no idea who she is yet — I go no further with this business. This girl is dining with me in Paris the day after tomorrow, and I simply won't have my evening messed up, and that's flat."

"One thing at a time, Falcon — all right, don't fly off the handle. Now, how are you going to let the big man know we are after this dame?"

"*You* are going to let him know, Poss. It is now eleven. Mr. Harvey Morgan, known as Chappie, is at his desirable residence in Grosvenor Street nearby giving a men's dinner. Ring him up right now and tell him, just as a matter of interest, that you were given some bogus information about that man Falcon tonight; that you

have searched him without success for stolen property; that Falcon has promised to work with you and has given you the name of a lady whom you are going to question first thing in the morning; and that you are ringing him up just to tell him and other directors of Universal & Allied that you will have some interesting information to give them at noon tomorrow. Snap to it, Chief-Inspector."

"Holy smoke!" said Poss. "Chappie Morgan, is it! This is going to make the headlines all right. Chappie Morgan, eh! I always wondered where he really came from."

"Last year," said Detective-Sergeant Daisy with relish, "I made a nice little bit on a horse of his at Gatwick. The bookmakers are going to take a day off when Chappie hangs, for it's said he has won packets and——"

"That's enough of your low gossip, Daisy," said the Chief-Inspector severely. "Now, Falcon, this Mr. Harvey Morgan is an important man. You really mean me to ring him up and——"

Gay Falcon showed his teeth in a grin which lacked even the pretence of amiability. "You must introduce me to your mother, Poss, so I can ask her if you were bumped on the head when a child. Now get busy, man, before that dinner-party breaks up."

When the Chief-Inspector had spoken his piece to Mr. Harvey Morgan he turned a jaundiced eye on Gay Falcon.

"If his reactions to that rigmarole," he said bitterly, "weren't those of an innocent man, I'll — I'll disguise myself as a policewoman."

"You'd have to grow a moustache first," said Falcon. "What did he say?"

"First, he chuckled himself silly, and then ——"

"I've known a laughing murderer," said Sergeant Daisy. "He had some kind of gland trouble and ——"

"You shut up," said the Chief-Inspector violently. "And then, when I tell Chappie that juicy bit about the important information I am going to give them at noon tomorrow, he says he always knew Gay Falcon was a clever chap with a mind so crooked that he could see round corners, and he congratulates us all."

"Right!" said Falcon briskly. "Now, Poss, if you can be serious for a moment, put on that awful bowler of yours and follow me. Either of you got a gun?"

"No, we haven't. We are policemen, not gentlemen detectives."

"Okay. Sailors can't swim either."

Falcon snatched an automatic from a drawer and was slipping it into his pocket, when Poss said:

"I'll have that, mister. You've a license, I suppose?"

"Oh no," said Falcon savagely. "Mussolini himself gave it to me to use as a toothpick whenever I felt extra peaceful after meals."

Mrs. Temple's apartment was on the fourth floor of one of those hand-

some new blocks of flats which try very hard to look like imposing homes for rich people and succeed in looking like hospitals for rich people being treated for loneliness.

The bedroom window of each flat gave out onto a small balcony. This was not strictly a balcony but in the nature of a decoration, and therefore it was a somewhat tight fit for the substantial figures of the two detectives and Gay Falcon.

Mrs. Temple, whose maid slept in the domestic quarters, had let them in and passed them through her bedroom to the hide-out on the balcony. She had tried to smile at Falcon, but she had confessed to wishing he had thought of trying some other method of catching his shark.

Chief-Inspector Poss, squeezed into a corner of the balcony, was not in the best of tempers. For one thing, it was a chilly night, and for another, he didn't like being on balconies.

"We'd look darn silly," he said sourly, "if this thing gave way and we fell into the square like a ton of Juliets in trousers."

"We are only doing our duty, sir," said Daisy, who was enjoying himself.

The bedroom window was ajar, so that they could hear anything that passed in the room. The thick curtains were not drawn, but the white net across the windows was sufficient to make the visibility poor. Still, the watchers on the tiny balcony could see everything in outline, and they could hear the slightest sound. Mrs. Temple was in bed, her eyes on a book.

"I don't like this," said the Chief-Inspector. "Suppose he pulls a gun on her before we can stop him?"

"It would be tough luck on her, wouldn't it?" said Falcon. "She certainly makes a pretty picture."

Suddenly the bedroom door was seen to open, noiselessly. The watchers stood rigid, Poss with the automatic in his hand. A man came in, a tall bulky shape. Mrs. Temple, unaware, still had her eyes on her book.

"Well, Diana?"

The start of surprise with which she put down the book was, considering how frightened she must be, a pretty piece of acting.

"Harry! What is it — why have you come tonight, when you said ——"

He came towards the bed, and his face became clearer to the watchers on the balcony. Chief-Inspector Poss turned startled eyes on Falcon.

"Diana," the man said conversationally, "I am afraid I have bad news for you. But in a way it's your own fault for not having managed to frame Falcon and give me time to getaway."

"But I tried to, darling, only he must have suspected and ——"

"I know, I know. Luck is good or bad. It's bad now, Diana — for you. Falcon has been very clever. It was that fool Morgan who insisted on engaging him for this investigation, and now he knows a sight too much. I was dining with Chappie tonight when the police rang him up to say that they are going to question you in the morning, and I fear, Diana, that I can't risk that. Of course, a

wife can't give evidence against her husband, but she can — if she hates going to prison as much as you do — give the police a lot of very dangerous information."

Detective-Sergeant Daisy, more pop-eyed than ever, stared at Poss and whispered, "Lumme, 'Arry Temple in the flesh! I 'ad my suspicions of 'im ten years ago, just before he vanished, and then he was as bald as my palm."

Temple was sitting on the side of his wife's bed now. They could not see her expression. They could only see that she stiffened against the pillows behind her.

"Harry," she whispered, "you can't — you can't! Not to *me* ——"

"I don't want to, Diana, but how can I help myself? With the jewellery I've got tucked away and my American investments, I can still live my life out in Mexico. And I've always told you I wouldn't be taken — and if, at the worst, I've got to be, I'd rather hang than rot in prison. But I fancy I can get away tonight, in Chappie's aeroplane from Heston. I'm really sorry, Diana, because I've loved you for ten years, and you've been a darned helpful wife, but I can't trust you when you are questioned tomorrow, and ——"

"But they will get you, anyway," she whispered frantically. "Probably all the airports are watched. I told Falcon your name and that you killed Stella Bowman ——"

As she said that name, Temple's expression, hitherto queerly normal and almost affectionate, hardened into such savage contempt that she screamed.

"You double-crossing vixen," he said very quietly, and as she screamed again his bulk obliterated all but her fair hysterical face, and his hands dug deep into her throat.

As the watchers on the balcony burst into the room, Harry Temple, his gloved hands still savaging his wife's throat, gave a thick sobbing gasp. His handsome face stared at them with a look of idiotic surprise, and then he leapt frantically towards the door.

Poss and Daisy had no difficulty in holding him, while Gay Falcon, his eyes darting about the room, stood by the bed patting Mrs. Temple's clutching hand. Trying to smile up at him thankfully, her breath came in bruised hysterical sobs.

Temple, held by the detectives, seemed to collapse.

"Henry Edward Hammersley," Poss began in his official voice, "or Henry Edward Temple, I am going to charge you with the attempted murder of your wife. There will be other charges. You will accompany me to Vine Street and ——"

Harry Temple turned blindly towards the bed and, his blurred eyes accusing his wife, made some thick incoherent sounds even as a violent spasm made him sag helpless in the detectives' arms. Poss and Daisy got him to a chair. Poss reddened with temper.

"Daisy, ring a doctor quick. He has poisoned himself somehow."

Mrs. Temple, sobbing uncontrollably, suddenly clung tight to Gay Falcon's arm.

"I won't," Poss said savagely, "ever hear the end of this if he gets away with it — right under my nose. But how could I have stopped him?"

"You couldn't help it," Falcon said. "I'll back you up."

"Please, *please*," Diana Temple sobbed, "don't let him — die — in here! *Please* — I can't bear any more — he always said he'd poison himself if ——"

Poss was busy searching the unconscious man's pockets.

Falcon pointed to a tiny rubber bulb and some remnants of smashed glass on the floor between the bed and the chair on which Temple lay.

"That's how he did it, Poss — a hypodermic. We crushed it under our feet as he dropped it. You don't have to tell me it smells of bitter almonds — they always do."

Poss, carefully putting the remnants of the hypodermic into a handkerchief, said soothingly:

"All right, Mrs. Temple, we'll do our best. Falcon, give me a hand while Daisy is telephoning and we'll get Temple out into the hall."

"I can't," said Gay Falcon, smiling tenderly at Mrs. Temple's lovely distracted face. "This lady is in no state to be left alone even for a moment — and I guess she needs a doctor a deal more than Harry Temple does by now."

Poss looked at him with disgust, but just then Sergeant Daisy came back and between them they heaved Temple's inert bulk out of the room.

Falcon at once sat on the bed, and while she clung to him with terror that would not be soothed, he ran the fingers of one hand protectively through her soft fair hair.

"Thank God," she whispered, "you were here, Gay Falcon! Where would I be now but for you? Oh, I can't bear to think of ——"

Poss re-entered the room and looked at them, particularly at Falcon, with severe disapproval.

"Mrs. Temple," he said sternly, "I regret to have to tell you that your husband has cheated the law. I shall have to take a brief statement from you now, while a full statement can be taken in the morning in the presence of your lawyer. Mr. Falcon, will you be so good as to leave the lady alone for just one minute so that she can give me her undivided attention?"

Still clinging to Falcon's arm, Diana Temple was obviously on the verge of an hysterical collapse.

"I simply can't talk now," she pleaded frantically. "Gay, please tell him — make him leave it all till——"

Poss said: "I sympathize, Mrs. Temple, but a couple of minutes will suffice. From what we overheard we can establish that the dead man was the brain behind the insurance thefts and also the murderer of Stella Bowman. Further, we were ourselves witnesses of as clear a case of attempted murder as ——"

"Attempted?" said Gay Falcon, still caressing Mrs. Temple's hair. "Why attempted, Poss? Henry Edward Temple was very thoroughly murdered — right under our noses — by his loving wife."

As she tried to wrench herself away, he held her to him more tightly, in what was now a grotesque parody of affection. She said not a word, her breath coming in thick gasps. Then, suddenly, she threw her head back and started screaming.

Falcon let her fall back on to the bed. She went on screaming, contorting her body frantically beneath the bedclothes. Daisy ran in, popeyed.

"Let her yell," Falcon said. "She's an expert on hysterics. Restrain your pity, Daisy — she had darn little for Stella Bowman when she strangled her."

Poss said: "But look here, we found the smashed hypodermic with which he ——"

Falcon held out a pocket handkerchief, on which lay another small hypodermic, unbroken, half-full.

"She had two — I was looking for this under the pillow while you and she thought I was flirting with her. It was almost undetectable murder, given the circumstances. A clear case of a thief and murderer — so we were expected to think — poisoning himself to escape the law. But what actually happened was that as Temple made a grab at her she chucked one hypodermic on to the floor, pretty certain it would be trodden underfoot, and then, just as we came in, jabbed him in the thigh with the other. You'll find her fingerprints on this."

Diana Temple, her lovely eyes dilated, lay staring at Gay Falcon.

"You beast!" she whispered. "You sneaky filthy Romeo! But you can't prove I killed Stella Bowman!"

Falcon regarded her absently. "You should watch your words, Mrs. Temple — they will be used against you."

Once outside in the hall, Poss said: "How did you get on to her?"

"Not till almost the last minute, Poss. Though I have been married to two pretty women and thought I was hard-boiled, she had me on a string all right. She had me just where she wanted me, believing that she was being victimized by Hammersley or Morgan, I wasn't quite certain which. It was always obvious that an insurance man was behind this racket.

"And then, at almost the very last minute, she made a mistake. Remember, she told Temple quite *unnecessarily* that she had told *me* who he was and that he had killed Stella Bowman. Then I knew that she was goading him into trying to kill her, and I wondered why. Remember, she did not accuse him of having killed Mrs. Bowman, all she said was that she had told me so ——

"So that we, listening, could pin the charge on him — and also, when he made a grab at her, so that she could get a good chance of putting him away? All right, that can stick. You can kill in self-defense — but

not with poison, and not when you *know* detectives are there to protect you. But why did she have to put Temple away?

"Because, if he escaped, she would always be frightened of him and he might interfere with her life as the beautifully dressed and frantically fashionable Diana Temple — and being one of the best-dressed women in the world has been the money motive behind her crimes. Because, again, if he was arrested, he would have given us proofs that she was not only the brains behind the insurance racket but also the killer of Stella Bowman. But I fancy she was right there, you will never convict her of that crime — Temple's death will be quite enough to go on with. An unpleasant character. But she will look swell in the box, all in black."

"Here's a real puzzler. The author was drafted just before he got to the last chapter."

(by permission of The Saturday Review of Literature)

The "mathematics of murder" is a phrase large with implication. It might refer to the exact science of murder. It might refer to the money-motive that is the root of most homicides. It might refer to The Thinking Machine's famous dictum of detection: two plus two are four — not sometimes but always. Cornell Woolrich's application involves all the variations: the exact science and the mercenary root; but unlike The Thinking Machine, Mr. Woolrich's Inspector Evans does not add two and two. He adds one, subtracts one, and strangely enough ends up with just the opposite of **zero**. . . .

THE MATHEMATICS OF MURDER

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HIS FACE got pale, standing at the telephone. He was there by himself, talking to someone. It was late at night, and his voice was low. No one in the room to hear him, no one in the room to see him. He lived alone —now.

His name was Colin Hughes.

The conversation had been going for some time. One-way; he'd been doing the listening, mostly. His face had been strained, uneasy, from the very beginning. But it was pale now, at something that was just said.

"No, don't," he said hoarsely. "I'll make good. I'll pay. I've told you that already. Only, I can't this minute; I haven't got that much right now. If you'll only give me a little more time."

Then he listened some more. He tried to light a cigarette with one hand, but he was too nervous, he dropped it. His hand was shaking.

"I know you've given me plenty of time already," he faltered. "But if you'll only give me a little more —"

His forehead ridged and twinkled with sweat along the seams between the ridges.

"I haven't that much, I tell you," he pleaded. "Give me a break, give me more time." His voice had the bends in it. "Where am I going to get it?" He looked around him helplessly.

There was a photograph on the dresser. He'd seen it lots before. He must have. It was his dresser. It was even a little faded, the photograph, so it must have been standing on the dresser for a long time, it must have been left over on it from habit.

It said under it: "To Colin from his loving wife Maureen." The date was three years ago.

He turned back to the phone again. But only after pregnant minutes. His voice was brisker now. It had juice in it now. The ridges had left his forehead; it was smooth again, like stone.

He said, "How much time can I have?"

Then he said, "No, I'm not still

stalling, this is on the level. This is the pay-off. I know how I can get it now."

Then he listened. Then he said, "Yes, I'm sure of getting it. It's as good as mine now. I've already as good as got it, you might say, but I need time to collect it. A certain amount of time. Restrictions covering it. How much can I have?"

The party must have believed him. The ring of his voice must have sold it. The answer must have been a good one. Something he liked hearing. The pallor was all gone now, his color had come up again. Red; which is the color of blood. He was even grinning. So do skulls.

"As long as I'm sure of getting it, I can have as much time as it requires? Well, I am sure."

He looked over at the photograph again.

"*Dead* sure."

He hung up.

He looked over at the photograph some more. He looked at it steadily.

Colin Hughes had stopped in for a minute to see his girl. He didn't even take his hat off, he told her he wasn't going to stay. "I just wanted to tell you I'm coming over to see you tomorrow night," he said to her.

She wasn't an acutely perceptive type — he didn't like his girls acutely perceptive — but this struck even her as a little strange.

"But you come over and see me nearly every night," she said. "Why do you have to come over special the night before to tell me you'll be here the night after?"

"I just wanted to tell you, that's all. Have some people here."

"But you always like it best when we're by ourselves."

"This time I feel like having some people around for a change. See that you do it."

He was looking around the room as though he'd never seen it before.

His eyes stopped one time, as if they'd found something. Then they went on past there again. After a minute he gave his head a hitch back toward that place where they'd stopped.

"How often do you wind that clock?"

"Once every eight days. It's an eight-day clock."

"When's its next winding due?"

"Not for six more days. I did it two days ago."

After that he didn't talk any more about it. He had that way of skipping; she never could keep up with him.

"Take a look out, see if I left the lights on on my car."

She stepped out into the hall, looked through the glass in the front door. Then when she came back again, he didn't give her a chance to tell him whether he had left the lights on or not.

"I'm going now," he said abruptly.

He had her midget radio tucked under his arm; he was winding its aerial wire around it to keep it from trailing.

"Where you taking that?"

"Down to the repair shop; you've

been saying it needs new tubes."

"Yeah, but won't we need it for the party? It plays good enough the way it is."

"We'll do without it at the party; we'll play records or something instead."

"Who'll I have?"

"Your sister and her husband, the people next door to them, it don't much matter who." Then he added, "Don't ask that guy Miller, though, from down the street. He's always looking at his watch, he wants to go home."

She accompanied him out into the hall. "Don't forget what I told you now, I'm coming around tomorrow night at eight," he said.

"I know, you told me that already."

"At eight, I said."

"I heard you," she protested patiently.

He gave her a sort of half-muffed kiss; he'd had her about six weeks already and she was beginning to wear off on him.

She walked to the door with him, and he got in the car and drove away. She came back into the room again, started putting out the lights. As long as he wasn't going to be around down here, she may as well go up to bed.

Her eyes rested on the clock for a minute in passing.

"That's funny," she murmured to herself indifferently. "He wasn't here a whole hour, he was only here a minute or two. I looked at it just before he got here and I could have sworn it was eight. Now it's nine already."

She left it alone. It really didn't matter to her. When he wasn't around, she wasn't going any place, she wasn't doing anything, so what difference did it make?

She was getting dressed to go out with her husband. She was taking a lot of trouble with her dressing. She always did. She was what they call a well-dressed woman.

And tonight in particular she wanted to look good. She hadn't seen him in over a year. She hadn't seen him since that last day in the divorce court, when the final decree was handed down.

Funny he should phone her like that, suddenly, out of nowhere. She'd been glad to hear from him, though. She still had a soft spot left for him, she guessed. He'd remembered it was their anniversary, he said. He'd wondered if she had any objection to seeing him again, going out with him tonight for old times' sake?

Why not? There hadn't been any bitterness, any woman-trouble between them. It was that most modern of all divorce-causes: financial jealousy. She'd begun to make more money than he did, and he couldn't take it, it got on his nerves. She'd kept going up the scale all the time, while he'd kept going down. Each job she got was a boost, each job he got was a come-down. And between each of his jobs, toward the end, there was a longer and longer wait, while she had to carry him.

All right, let bygones be bygones. One night couldn't hurt.

She didn't even mind putting herself out, going all the way out to meet him at that rather out-of-the-way place he'd suggested, instead of having him pick her up here. It was a sort of remote roadhouse, where they'd sometimes gone in their courtship days; sentiment, she supposed, had made him select it tonight. Funny, she'd thought it was no longer in existence, she'd heard it had closed up quite some time ago. But when she'd mentioned that just now, he'd assured her she was mistaken, it was still in operation. Well, he ought to know; he was calling her right from there, he'd said.

She was ready now. She had on black velvet, soft as a kitten's fur; one of the new wartime evening dresses, to the knees only. There was a silver fox cape on the bed. First she was going to go without it. She didn't really need it. It was warm tonight.

She got as far as the door, opened it, stepped outside, and was about to close it after her.

Then she changed her mind, went back again, and put the cape on. She didn't look well-dressed without it. And what was the good of having one if you didn't wear it? A well-dressed woman doesn't dress for the weather alone, she dresses mainly for looks.

Now she looked like the finished job, now she was satisfied. And if she was too warm in it, she could take it off in the car; at least she'd have it with her to show.

This time she did leave, for good. For good was right.

The detective comes into it now. Nothing brilliant or exceptional about him. He worked hard for his thirty-six hundred a year. He never got anything by intuition. He never got anything by brain-waves. He only got it by work.

He wasn't bright even in a general sense. In fact he was dumb, limited, in a rut. He didn't know anything about hardly anything, except one thing: being a detective. He knew everything there was to know about that. He was a good detective.

His name was Evans.

She was lying dead on a seldom-used road, near a closed-down roadhouse. Her own car was standing not far off. It was easy to see what had happened. She'd got into difficulties with it, stepped incautiously out into the road to try to get help, and something coming along had knocked her down and killed her.

Nothing remarkable about it, except the fact that she was so well-dressed.

Evans went over and looked at her.

"Accident," one of the men said. "Hit and run."

Evans took a good long look. Eight years' worth of a look; that was how long he'd been a detective. Thirty-six hundred dollars' worth of a look.

"No, it wasn't," he said. And that was all he said.

He went away from there and began to work. It wasn't his job to pick them

up. It was just his job to see that they were paid up for.

Within twelve hours he'd already had his first talk with the woman's husband. That wasn't anything. A harness cop would have done as much. The woman had been married to this man. She wasn't at the time of her death. But there was no one else closely related to her. That was all it was.

"You know your former wife is dead?"

"I read it in the papers."

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"In the judge's chambers just about a year ago. The day we were handed down our decree. We shook hands and wished each other luck and that was that."

"How was she fixed financially?"

"I don't know. Good, I guess. She had a big department-store job. Vice-president or something."

The detective became confidential, man to man. "Down there they tell me she was hauling down twenty thousand a year; vice-president of the whole works or something. I suppose you know you were named beneficiary on her insurance."

The husband pricked up his ears. "No, I didn't. How much is it for?"

"I don't know anything about that. You'll have to take that up with them."

He must have said something the detective didn't like. The detective backed up instead of going on forward. This was the first time it had happened in the whole conversation.

"Would you give me the dates of your marriage, from when to when. Just for the record."

"1940 to 1943."

"The insurance was taken out in 1942. You were married to her at the time. How is it you didn't know you were the beneficiary?"

"I did know *then*. You didn't understand — what I meant — I didn't know I was *still* the beneficiary. I thought she'd changed that since."

"Oh, I see."

But that must have been something the detective didn't like. His flow of questioning wasn't smooth any more. It had jammed.

It was like grit on a railroad track: it can throw a whole train.

The door closed finally.

Colin Hughes mopped his face.

Anyone would, after talking to a detective. There's something about them. Anyone would.

Hughes's girl got frightened. She said, "Is he in trouble? What'd he do?"

"No, he isn't in trouble. He didn't do anything. Just a check-up. Doesn't mean anything, don't let it bother you. He was over here last night with you, that right?"

"Yes, he was."

"Just the two of you by yourselves?"

"No, we had some others. A party, like."

"What was it in celebration of?"

She looked blank, as though this hadn't occurred to her herself until now. She looked helpless. "I don't know."

"When you have a party, isn't it usually in celebration of something? What was it, somebody's birthday, a wedding anniversary?"

"No reason. I guess we just felt like it."

"Well, who got it up?"

She looked helpless again. "I guess it just got itself up."

"Who was at it?"

"Oh, nobody much. My sister and her husband, the couple next door to them. That's about all."

He drifted toward the door. "I may be back," he said. "But don't be frightened. I usually forget things I want to ask the first time, and have to come back again and ask them the second time. I'm not very good that way."

She wasn't very perceptive. "I suppose he was doing the best he could," she thought patronizingly, "but he acted like he didn't know what it was all about. They must take anybody on the detective division these days."

Hughes's girl's sister said, "Oh, from about seven-thirty until about twelve, I guess. She insisted that we come over. We *were* going to the movies. Tuesday's our regular night for the movies. And it was the last night for Jean Arthur, too. But we didn't have the heart to turn her down, she seemed so set on it, so we went over there instead."

The couple next door to Hughes's girl's sister said, "We turned her down the first time she called; Mike didn't want to go, he's pretty tired these days from working. But she wouldn't take no for an answer, so the second time she called we gave in and went."

He showed up again, so he must have remembered something he'd forgotten to ask her the first time.

"Who suggested having that party? He or you?"

"It was between the both of us, I guess."

"What time did you call him, about coming over?"

"I didn't, he just came."

"But he brought an armful of records in with him, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did!" She beamed, still pleased in retrospect at this mark of attention.

"Then, if you didn't call him, how'd he know enough to bring records to the party?"

She would have fallen into a bad silence there, but he pulled her out of it, since this wasn't an unfriendly questioning, so to speak. He forgot, and asked her one of the same questions over.

"Who first spoke of having the party, he or you?"

There was only one way out, so what could she do, she had to take it, she couldn't stay there walled-in by contradictions. "Well, I guess he said something the night before about having some people in. Then I did the calling. So it was like between the two

of us, you might say."

He nodded, satisfied. He was very easy to satisfy, really.

"What time'd he get here?"

"Oh, it was about eight o'clock."

"How do you know? Excuse me for annoying you, but I'm in a funny business. We have to have everything down to a T."

"It was on the clock, that's how I know."

"What made you look at the clock?"

"He came in and he said, 'Everybody here already! What am I, late? What time is it?' So I looked. You know how you look when somebody says something like that."

"Yes, I know how you look when somebody says something like that." Then he said carelessly, more to himself than her, "I guess he took the other girl home first, and then came over here, that's what held him up a little getting here —"

"What other girl?" she said sharply.

"You know, the one he had out in the car with him," he said absentmindedly, his attention on what he was writing.

She didn'tsay very much after that. He didn't ask her anything more anyway, so there was no compulsion for her to speak.

"Do I have to answer any more of your questions?"

"No, not a one."

She slammed the door after him.

He started to walk away from the house. Not very fast, but still with every earmark of final departure. He had one hand pocketed. He was holding two of its fingers crossed.

The door opened again behind him. He uncrossed his fingers, but kept walking.

"Mister," she called out, "I forgot to tell you —"

He turned and looked back at her. "Yes?"

"That clock was an hour slow. He got here at eight by my clock. *But everywhere else it was nine!*"

The man at the garage said, "This is it, this one here."

Evans said, "Has there been any cleaning done on it?"

"No, not a thing. Just bedded-down for the night."

Evans was bleaching the treads with his flashlight, stroking it as carefully along them as though he were painting them with a brush.

"What is it, mister?"

"I ask them, you answer them."

Evans even got in and drove it a half-wheel-turn out of place, to uncover the patches of tire that had rested on the garage-floor. Then he painted the seats white with his light too, up and down in straight lines, as though he were a typical house-painter.

"You clock them, don't you?"

"Yeah, we use a time-keeping system."

"How long has it been in?"

"I can get that for you." They went down front. "He brought it back here at eleven-forty-five."

"You sure of that?"

"Mister, it's right here on this card.

They pay by the hour. Why should we cheat ourselves?"

"Before that, when did it go out?"

"Ten to nine."

"Damn!" Evans said viciously.

"What's the matter, mister?"

"That was the wrong answer."

Didn't use his own car, he said to himself.

He copied out a stiff two-and-a-half columns from the Classified Directory. On the page headed "Auto Rentals." It started with Acme and it ran down to Zenith. Then the Auto Supplies began. He didn't want that.

The twenty-ninth listing, at about the two-thirds point, was "Monarch Automobile Rental." He got down to it finally. He stayed there.

"Yeah, we rented out three cars yesterday," the man at Monarch said.

"Show them to me."

He gave them the torchlight treatment, one by one.

He put his torch away. "This car's impounded. Don't rent it out any more, and don't let anyone go near until I can send someone over here."

"Why, what's the matter with it? What'd you find on it just now?"

"A silver fox hair on the back of the seat, that was all. Couple of small stains on the tires. I wouldn't care to say what they are myself. But I've got someone who can and will. Who rented this car?"

"A Mr. Joe Miller."

"Joe Miller. That's a good enough name. What kind of credentials did he give? Let's have a look."

The man hesitated.

"You mean you rent out cars here without security?"

"Ordinarily, no," the man admitted. "But he left quite a large deposit, more than enough to cover any possible damage, or even outright loss of the whole car, and it was just for a very short time—"

"So you let him drive out of here with it just as was. You'd better tell me what this Joe Miller looked like."

The man described him, haltingly but painstakingly.

Evans took a hefty kick at a nearby tire. Not of the car in question, but one of the others.

"What's the matter, mister?"

"That was the wrong answer."

Got someone else to rent the car for him, he said to himself as he strode out.

He had his cue poised for a trick corner-pocket shot when Evans's hand landed on his arm and killed the shot for him. He just stayed there, draped over the edge of the pool-table, without moving, without even looking around to see who it was, for a solid minute afterwards. The way a small animal, a ferret or a weasel, stands motionless when it feels itself trapped.

A hand with a tin lining came around in front of his face.

"Take off your eyeshade and come outside, I want to talk to you."

"Can't I finish the game first?" he said surlily.

"You have already."

The tin said do it. He did it.

Upstairs on the sidewalk outside the pool-room Evans stopped and told him things. Things he knew already.

"Your name's Chuck Flynn. Last night you rented a car from Monarch under the name of Joe Miller. What'd you do with it and where'd you go?"

"I don't have to —" this Flynn began defensively.

"Okay, you don't have to," Evans agreed. "You're under arrest for murder then. Come on."

Flynn nearly fell to pieces in his hands. "I never murdered anyone — I — I — ! Wait — ! Don't, will you?"

"The car's a murder-car, and you took it out and brought it back, so that makes you It."

"It wasn't me! I wasn't in it! I just took it out for someone else!"

"Now you're telling it?"

"Now I'm telling it!" He was practically drooling, he was spilling it so fast. "I was cleaned out playing against some of the fellows back there, and I come up on the sidewalk for a breath of air. A fellow goes by while I'm standing there. He kind of looks me over in passing, and all of a sudden he changes his mind, turns and comes back to me. He asks me if I'd care to do him a favor. He says there's twenty bucks in it for me, if I'm willing."

"And you were willing?"

"I wanted to get back into the game. And twenty bucks is no mean stake."

"This is corn right off the cob," Evans told him with an air of utter disbelief. "But go ahead, what was the favor?"

"He was in a jam. He'd lied to his girl, told her he had a car of his own, and she was waiting somewhere for him to take her out in it. If he didn't show up in one, she was the kind would quit going around with him, he said. He'd tried two or three car-agencies already, but there was too much red tape, and he had no driver's license or something. He said he'd heard that at this Monarch place, if you greased the mitt of the guy there, he'd let you have a car without all that, as long as you left a deposit to cover loss of the car. But the rub was, he said, he'd already had one of their cars out once before, and he still owed them some money for damages that he'd never paid up. He was afraid they'd recognize him and turn him down if he went there himself, and he asked me if I'd do it for him, under a fake name, not my own, of course."

"And you fell for that?" Evans said scathingly.

"What did I care, I wasn't giving my right name. So I took it out for him, and I just drove it around the corner, and picked him up where he was waiting. Then he dropped me off at the poolroom, and I played again for an hour. There was still half of the twenty coming to me, and I wanted to collect it, so about quarter to nine I went outside and met him again like we'd arranged. He showed up right on time. I took the car back for him and reclaimed the deposit."

"How much was it?"

"It was a hundred bucks, less the

rental of the car."

"And you gave that back to him?"

Flynn's eyes slanted evasively. "He — wasn't there any more, when I got back where I'd left him. I don't know what happened to him. I couldn't find him."

Evans chuckled grimly. "You know, the funny part of what you just said is this: You think you're telling a lie, and you're trying to get me to believe it's the truth. But the fact of the matter is, it *is* the truth, without your knowing it. He *wasn't* there any more, he *didn't* wait. If you'da gone back looking for him, you wouldn't have found him, just like you say you didn't. Only you didn't go back looking for him. You went the other way, to get as far away from him as you could with that deposit-money." He nodded, said, more to himself than his prisoner, "Smart play. Very smart. He figured you'd do just that, walk off with the money. And he wanted you to. It was the best guarantee in the world that you'd stay out of sight, keep your mouth shut about the whole thing from then on. Cheap, at that price."

Flynn was shaking all over.

He was also shaking the detective imploringly, with both hands at once. "I know it sounds phony. But you've got to believe me! You've got to!"

"No, I don't," Evans answered mercilessly. He took his time. Then he added, "But it so happens — I do."

"What're you looking so glum about, Evans?" somebody on the squad said to him. "Has working on that case about the well-dressed dame lying in the road got you down?"

"Working on it? I'm all finished."

"Then what're you wearing your chin down on your wishbone for? You got the guy that did it?"

"Long ago. I've got everything but one thing: the actual, life-sized proof."

"What do you do in a case like that? I guess you just wait until you get it."

"No, you make it yourself."

Chuck Flynn was scared when Evans showed up and took him out of his cell. He was even more scared when the detective shoved him onto a bus without a word and rode all the way uptown with him. He was terrified when they got out again and walked along anonymous streets. And by the time his captor had stopped abruptly and turned aside with a muttered, "This is as good a place as any," he was verging on panic.

"What'd you bring me here for? What're you going to do with me now?" he quavered.

"Just stand here back inside this store-entrance with me," Evans ordered crisply. "Now keep your eyes on that doorway across the street. See the one I mean? That one." He scanned his watch. "It's ten to five now. For the next twenty minutes we're going to stand here; that ought to be long enough. Between now and ten past five, you watch everyone that goes in that doorway. When you see someone you've seen before, no

matter who it is, jerk my sleeve."

They watched and waited.

A man went in. A woman went in. Another man went in. A man and woman came out.

At 5.08 Evans felt a tug on his sleeve.

"That's him. Didje see that guy that just went in there now, in a tan coat? That's him. The guy I was telling you about, that come up to me outside the pool-hall the other night —"

Evans just stared across at the doorway, empty now.

"Don'tcha believe me?" Flynn was whining in falsetto. "That's him, I tell ya! I know it; I got good eyes for things like that."

Evans nodded. "I know it too. I knew it even before. But knowing it and proving it are two different things."

Flynn was dancing from foot to foot with impatience. "Ain't you going to go over there and —?"

Evans didn't budge. "If I bring the two of you face to face, it's still just your word against his. That's not good enough. You'll say he got in the car; he'll say he didn't get in the car." He scratched his chin in leisurely cogitation. "If I could only fix it so I'd have your word *and* his, against his own —"

Suddenly he slapped the store-door open, towed Flynn outside after him. All the latter's jitters came back, one hundred proof. "What're you going to do with me now?"

Evans kept walking — down the street away from the doorway they'd been spotting.

"You got twenty bucks for getting out of that car the other night. How'd you like to get another twenty for staying in it? All the way to wherever it went and back?"

"I don't get you."

"You don't have to. You just get the twenty bucks."

Hughes found a message waiting for him when he came home from work. They had a switchboard operator who took calls for the tenants while they were out. It was short and calamitous. "Call Inspector Evans of the Police Dep't as soon as you return." And the Headquarters number was appended.

He stood and looked at it. The operator and switchboard swung all the way around him like a merry-go-round a couple of times.

To the operator, looking at the outside of his face, there was just puzzlement there. "Must be something about your car," the operator suggested. "That's all it is, usually, when they call you up like that."

Yes, it was something about his car, all right, Hughes reflected wryly, without even cracking an inward grin.

He went upstairs like someone who has seen a ghost. When he'd gone inside his own room, the dresser-top, in *that* particular place, was empty; but maybe that was where the ghost emanated from.

He did a lot of walking around inside the room, without going any-

where. It can't be anything much, kept running through his head. They don't telephone you and ask you to call them when — they want you for something serious. They come up and get you.

He went over to the phone and he asked for the police-station number. A desk sergeant answered and gave the precinct house designation. He asked for Evans. His face was white again, like that night of the other phone conversation, here in this same room.

Suddenly Evans was on.

"Could you come down here as soon as possible?"

Cluck. Evans had hung up again.

His complexion hadn't improved any. There should have been pools of water on the floor where he'd been standing.

It's all right, it's got to be, he kept telling himself. They don't do it that way when they really — want you for something. Just routine, probably.

He waited awhile. He couldn't seem to make up his mind to go. He changed his shirt. He needed to by now. Warm day.

"But if I don't go, it makes it look — strange."

It was the worst form of torture. Maybe without knowing it, Evans had invented something new in police methods. A third-degree without the police themselves being present. A softening-up, a breaking-down.

He looked as if he'd been pulled through a wringer, before he'd even moved a step out of the place. It was now fully ten minutes since Evans had spoken to him on the phone. He should be almost arriving there by now. In another five minutes, if he hadn't got there, it would begin to look as if he were balking . . .

Suddenly he grabbed his hat and went. He went fast. He slammed out with a jerk and a bang. Almost as though he didn't trust himself to go any other way but that: blindly headlong.

He was still a little pale, but very straightforward and businesslike when he walked into the room the desk sergeant had indicated. Evans was sitting at a desk. They evidently did paper-work too, these dicks.

"What'd you ask to see me about?"

Evans got up and shook hands with him across the desk, warm and friendly, evidently considering their one previous interview grounds enough for this touch of sociability. He offered him a cigar, and then he pillowed his hands behind his head, cocked his elbows up, and relaxed, like a man taking time off from his official duties for a moment.

"We're holding a suspect," he said, "and we'd like your help."

"Suspect in what?"

"The death of your wife, Mr. Hughes. We've got the man who ran her down and killed her and then left the scene."

"Oh, you have," said Hughes neutrally.

"We've been pushing him around all day, and we've finally got him ripe enough to break down and confess.

He's run through all the usual stages; first, a complete denial, then a partial denial, then an attempt to involve someone else. Now he's about ready for the final stage of confession, involving no one but himself. There's where you come in; we'd like you to help us."

"How? How can I help? I —"

He was about to say more, but Evans cut him off. "He's tried to involve you," he said smoothly, "and that's how we can get at him, by bringing the two of you face to face. Then his last defense will crumble."

Hughes found the chair-seat a little hard on his pants; he shifted around a little. "How do you mean, involved —?"

Evans put him at his ease immediately. "Please don't be uncomfortable. If I thought you were going to be uncomfortable, I wouldn't have asked you to come down here. It's just that I thought, with your help, we could take a short-cut and put him out of his misery a little quicker. Look, I'll explain to you what I mean. Your wife met her death at approximately eight-twenty that night. Now, we've checked — no offense, Mr. Hughes, but we have to check in cases of this kind — and we know that you were at the house of a young lady friend of yours from about eight that night until well on toward twelve. About six different people saw you arrive there, and they all agree it was eight o'clock. So you're out of it entirely."

Again he stopped him. "Now wait, Mr. Hughes, let me finish before you say anything. However, you did do something that night, that for some reason or other, you overlooked mentioning to us before. You accepted a lift from a stranger for several blocks, from Mercer Street, on your way over to your girl's house." He began to speak more quickly, as if to prevent Hughes from interrupting. "We checked on that, and we know that you did ride those couple of blocks, you were recognized in the car with him. It's a ghastly coincidence, and you won't believe this, but that car and that stranger were actually the ones that, about half an hour after you got out again, hit and killed your wife out near the Rosedale Inn. It's one of those flukes that only happen maybe once in a hundred years. That gave him the idea for his alibi. Now, to save himself, he's trying to claim that you rode out with him all the way and back. And that you were at the wheel at the time. In other words, trying to pass the buck to you."

Again a swift pass of Evans's hand dammed up Hughes's brimming protests.

"He doesn't know we know who you are, of course, or can bring you forward to confound him. And above all, he doesn't know that we've found out to our satisfaction that you couldn't have been in *any* car, *any*where, at eight-twenty that night, because you were at a party at a certain young lady's house from eight on. Now do you see what we're driving at? All you have to do is tell us at

which point you left the car. All we're trying to establish is at what point, from what point on I should say, he took over the car alone. And is solely responsible for your wife's death. Have you any objection to helping us steam that out of him?"

"Not at all," Hughes said pensively. He thought it over. "Not at all," he said a second time.

"You do that, and I can promise you won't even be held as a material witness."

"Market Street," Hughes snapped.

"All right, bring him in," Evans said. "This ought to do the trick."

They brought Flynn in. He looked in bad shape. His eye had discolored in a very peculiar way. It almost looked as though ink had been splashed around it. He had various nicks and marks on him. You couldn't tell if they were blood or mercurochrome.

He was whimpering like someone who's had the stuffing laced out of him.

"Did you ever see this gentleman before?" Evans asked him tersely.

"He's — he's the one got in the car with me, at Mercer Street —"

"And for the last time, where did he get out again?"

"He didn't," the victim wailed. "He rode out all the way with me —"

Evans made a friendly signal to Hughes on the side, not to interrupt, to let the miscreant sew himself up in his own lies.

Flynn was babbling like a man who doesn't know what he's saying any more, he's told so many conflicting stories. "He came up to me and gave me some money to hire a car —"

"You're a liar, Flynn!" Evans said, and took a hefty poke at him. "I thought we knocked *that* fairy-tale out of you! Are you starting that one again? What would he need to hire a car for? He's got one of his own. Show him your driver's license, Mr. Hughes."

Flynn quickly retracted, in the face of this evidence. "I — I mean I gave him a lift, and he rode out in the car with me all the way —"

"You're still lying!" This time he cuffed him with the back of his hand. Then he turned to Hughes, with polite deference. "At what point did you step out of the car, Mr. Hughes?"

"Market Street," Hughes said, with a pitying look at the punch-drunk culprit.

"There's no reason why we should detain you any more. Would you have any objection to signing a statement to the effect that you got into that car at Mercer Street and left it again at Market Street, Mr. Hughes? Then we can use that as a point in evidence. We won't have to trouble you any further."

"I have no objection, none whatever," Hughes condescended.

A police stenographer was summoned, stuck a sheet of paper into a typewriter, and tapped it out then and there. Evans held it up and read it aloud for Hughes's approval. The wilting Flynn, meanwhile, had been pushed back against the wall.

" 'I rode in the car bearing license

plate number nine-o-eight, seven-six-one between Mercer Street and Market Street, on the night of April thirtieth.' That's all there is to it. Is that satisfactory, Mr. Hughes?"

"Let me see it a minute."

He read it at first hand. "Yes, that's perfectly satisfactory."

"Then if you'll sign it, in the presence of this witness and myself, we'll get to work on our friend here."

Hughes signed it.

Evans took it and blotted it. "You can go now," he said, scrutinizing it intently without looking up.

Hughes turned and started for the door. The cop who was by it stiff-armed him and sent him kiting back halfway across the room.

"Not you, him I was talking to," Evans said, with an indifferent jerk of his head toward the sheepishly-grinning Flynn. "And see that you stay around until you're wanted."

The door closed. Hughes was the only civilian left in the room. He was rocking there like a kingpin that's just been nicked by a hurtling ball and can't decide whether to stay up or topple down.

"But you said I wouldn't even be held as a material witness!" he gasped.

"That's right, you won't be. What you're being held for, as of now on, is something entirely different: murder in the first degree. In case you don't know your law-terms, that doesn't mean hit-and-run either: that means premeditated murder and it carries the death penalty."

The cop threw some water on him from the cooler, and they picked him up from the floor.

"You've admitted now you were in this particular car," Evans went ahead, when Hughes could hear him again. "I have your own signed statement to that effect. That was the hard part of it, getting you into the car. We're going to do it in reverse this time, by subtraction. Flynn can prove he was *out of the car*, steadily, from almost eight all the way around to nearly nine. He was seen by a whole pool-room full of people, playing away there in the middle of all of them. I worked on that all afternoon. You can't prove you were out of the car during that time."

"My girl —"

"You got there at nine. I can prove that clock there was an hour slow, all evening."

"See, all I had to do was get you into the car at all. The rest is just a matter of subtraction. The car didn't run out there under its own power and murder her. Two men in a car, from Mercer Street to Market Street. Take one out. The car goes ahead and kills her. What have you got left? *The one who stayed in it was the one who killed her.* He can prove he got out. You can't. That leaves you."

Hughes's head went all the way over, until he wasn't looking at anything but floor.

"That's close enough to a confession for the time being," Evans remarked contemptuously. "We can wire it for sound later. Take him out."

Evans turned his chief's compliment aside. He looked put out. "Fast work?" he repeated. "Fast work? Slow is what you mean, chief, slow as hell! I could have arrested him six hours after her death. I knew it was murder the minute I looked at the body, right where it was, lying on the street. I knew it was he the minute I talked to him. But I had to wait for proof. Worse than that, I had to build my own proof."

"All my men should be slow like that," his chief said devoutly. "But what do you mean you knew it was murder the minute you looked at the body?"

Evans turned up his hands expressively. "The body of a well-dressed woman like that, lying out in the street."

"But I don't get you. Can't a well-dressed person be knocked down and killed just as well as a poorly-dressed one?"

"Oh, sure. But his trouble was he was too accurate. She was too well-dressed. He'd been married to her, he knew her habits too well. He knew she never would have been caught dead without that silver fox cape on her. No matter what the weather. The only trouble was, she *was* caught dead without that silver fox cape on her."

"It was on her when she was found."

"That's what I mean exactly. She'd brought it with her, all right. He was right about that, she wouldn't be seen anywhere without it. Only for a moment, she must have slipped it off her. He got her out of the car on some excuse or other, and it stayed behind on the seat. Then he focused his headlights on her full-glare, blinded her, ran her down, and broke her back." He snapped his fingers. "She died like that.

"They always think they have to be so careful," he went on. "If he'd been just a little careless, he would have got away with it completely. He was just a little too careful, so he got caught. He wanted her to stay in character down to the last minor detail. Something that nobody but himself could have known about anyway. So, by trying so hard to make what was a murder look like an accident, he only managed to make what *would* have looked like an accident, if he'd let it alone, turn out to look like a murder.

"She had on a black velvet dress. It took the print of the wheels where they went over her like dusting powder almost. There was a tread-mark striping it down below, where there was no fur cape to cover it. But there was also a tread-mark striping it up above, *under* the fur cape.

"Just a matter of addition and subtraction. Add one silver fox cape to an already dead woman and you know it's murder. Subtract one man from two men in a death-car and you have proof. You might sorta call it the mathematics of murder, chief."

Eric Ambler (at the time of this writing, Captain Ambler with the British Directorate of Army Cinematography) is the author of JOURNEY INTO FEAR, A COFFIN FOR DIMITRIOS, CAUSE FOR ALARM, *and* BACKGROUND TO DANGER — *all four available in an omnibus titled* INTRIGUE, *published by Knopf. Eric Ambler is fast growing to be, if he already isn't, the top man in the field of spy-and-international-intrigue fiction. Howard Haycraft has said that in Mr. Ambler's secret service novels "cerebration is for once as important as shooting, and the two are blended together with neatness and credibility." Alfred Hitchcock, in his own way an expert on tales of espionage, has admitted that "Mr. Ambler has given new life and a fresh viewpoint to the art of the spy novel." And the "London News Chronicle" has gone so far as to nominate Mr. Ambler "the best living writer of thrillers."*

It is not generally known that Eric Ambler once wrote a series of pure detective short stories. These tales do not contain the thrills, excitement, and suspense of Mr. Ambler's full-length novels. They are quieter in conception, deliberately mannered and restrained in the intellectual technique rather than the sensational. The protagonist is a Dr. Jan Czissar, refugee from Czechoslovakia (Late Prague Police), who busybodies himself with London crime. The delightful result (from the reader's view) is that Dr. Czissar gets into Scotland Yard's hair— but fortunately (also from the reader's view) Scotland Yard proves itself not above learning a thing or two from a "foreign expert."

For all Mr. Ambler's economy of style and intentional understatement, you will find a true Continental flavor in Dr. Czissar — a quality seldom met in the work of a non-Continental writer.

In "The Case of the Emerald Sky" Dr. Jan Czissar, Czech detective, makes his début for American readers; mark your calendar for at least two return engagements to appear in early issues.

THE CASE OF THE EMERALD SKY

by ERIC AMBLER

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERCER of Scotland Yard stared, without speaking, at the card which Sergeant Flecker had placed before him.

There was no address, simply:

DR. JAN CZISSAR
Late Prague Police

It was an inoffensive-looking card. An onlooker, who knew only that Dr. Czissar was a refugee Czech with a brilliant record of service in the criminal investigation department of the Prague police, would have been surprised at the expression of dislike that spread slowly over the assistant commissioner's healthy face.

Yet, had the same onlooker known the circumstances of Mercer's first encounter with Dr. Czissar, he would not have been surprised. Just one week had elapsed since Dr. Czissar had appeared out of the blue with a letter of introduction from the mighty

Sir Herbert at the home office, and Mercer was still smarting as a result of the meeting.

Sergeant Flecker had seen and interpreted the expression. Now he spoke.

"Out, sir?"

Mercer looked up sharply. "No, sergeant. In, but too busy," he snapped.

Half an hour later Mercer's telephone rang.

"Sir Herbert to speak to you from the Home Office, sir," said the operator.

Sir Herbert said, "Hello, Mercer, is that you?" And then, without waiting for a reply: "What's this I hear about your refusing to see Dr. Czissar?"

Mercer jumped but managed to pull himself together. "I did not refuse to see him, Sir Herbert," he said with iron calm. "I sent down a message that I was too busy to see him."

Sir Herbert snorted. "Now look here, Mercer; I happen to know that it was Dr. Czissar who spotted those Seabourne murderers for you. Not blaming you, personally, of course, and I don't propose to mention the matter to the commissioner. You can't be right every time. We all know that as an organization there's nothing to touch Scotland Yard. My point is, Mercer, that you fellows ought not to be above learning a thing or two from a foreign expert. Clever fellows, these Czechs, you know. No question of poaching on your preserves. Dr. Czissar wants no publicity. He's grateful to this country and eager to help. Least we can do is to let him. We don't want any professional jealousy standing in the way."

If it were possible to speak coherently through clenched teeth, Mercer would have done so. "There's no question either of poaching on preserves or of professional jealousy, Sir Herbert. I was, as Dr. Czissar was informed, busy when he called. If he will write in for an appointment, I shall be pleased to see him."

"Good man," said Sir Herbert cheerfully. "But we don't want any of this red tape business about writing in. He's in my office now. I'll send him over. He's particularly anxious to have a word with you about this Brock Park case. He won't keep you more than a few minutes. Good-by."

Mercer replaced the telephone carefully. He knew that if he had replaced it as he felt like replacing it, the entire instrument would have been smashed. For a moment or two he sat quite still. Then, suddenly, he snatched the telephone up again.

"Inspector Cleat, please." He waited. "Is that you, Cleat? Is the commissioner in? . . . I see. Well, you might ask him as soon as he comes in if he could spare me a minute or two. It's urgent. Right."

He hung up again, feeling a little better. If Sir Herbert could have words with the commissioner, so could he. The old man wouldn't stand for his subordinates being humiliated and insulted by pettifogging politicians. Professional jealousy!

Meanwhile, however, this precious

Dr. Czissar wanted to talk about the Brock Park case. Right! Let him! He wouldn't be able to pull that to pieces. It was absolutely water-tight. He picked up the file on the case which lay on his desk.

Yes, absolutely water-tight.

Three years previously, Thomas Medley, a widower of 60 with two adult children, had married Helena Merlin, a woman of 42. The four had since lived together in a large house in the London suburb of Brock Park. Medley, who had amassed a comfortable fortune, had retired from business shortly before his second marriage, and had devoted most of his time since to his hobby, gardening. Helena Merlin was an artist, a landscape painter, and in Brock Park it was whispered that her pictures sold for large sums. She dressed fashionably and smartly, and was disliked by her neighbors. Harold Medley, the son aged 25, was a medical student at a London hospital. His sister, Janet, was three years younger, and as dowdy as her stepmother was smart.

In the early October of that year, and as a result of an extra heavy meal, Thomas Medley had retired to bed with a bilious attack. Such attacks had not been unusual. He had had an enlarged liver, and had been normally dyspeptic. His doctor had prescribed in the usual way. On his third day in bed the patient had been considerably better. On the fourth day, however, at about four in the afternoon, he had been seized with violent abdominal pains, persistent vomiting, and severe cramps in the muscles of his legs.

These symptoms had persisted for three days, on the last of which there had been convulsions. He had died that night. The doctor had certified the death as being due to gastro-enteritis. The dead man's estate had amounted to, roughly £110,000. Half of it went to his wife. The remainder was divided equally between his two children.

A week after the funeral, the police had received an anonymous letter suggesting that Medley had been poisoned. Subsequently, they had received two further letters. Information had then reached them that several residents in Brock Park had received similar letters, and that the matter was the subject of gossip.

Medley's doctor was approached later. He had reasserted that the death had been due to gastroenteritis, but admitted that the possibility of the condition having been brought by the wilful administration of poison had not occurred to him. The body had been exhumed by license of the home secretary, and an autopsy performed. No traces of poison had been found in the stomach; but in the liver, kidneys and spleen a total of 1.751 grains of arsenic had been found.

Inquiries had established that on the day on which the poisoning symptoms had appeared, the deceased had had a small luncheon consisting of breast of chicken, spinach (canned), and one potato. The cook had partaken of spinach from the same tin

without suffering any ill effects. After his luncheon, Medley had taken a dose of the medicine prescribed for him by the doctor. It had been mixed with water for him by his son, Harold.

Evidence had been obtained from a servant that, a fortnight before the death, Harold had asked his father for £100 to settle a racing debt. He had been refused. Inquiries had revealed that Harold had lied. He had been secretly married for some time, and the money had been needed not to pay racing debts but for his wife, who was about to have a child.

The case against Harold had been conclusive. He had needed money desperately. He had quarrelled with his father. He had known that he was the heir to a quarter of his father's estate. As a medical student in a hospital, he had been in a position to obtain arsenic. The poisoning that appeared had shown that the arsenic must have been administered at about the time the medicine had been taken. It had been the first occasion on which Harold had prepared his father's medicine.

The coroner's jury had boggled at indicting him in their verdict, but he had later been arrested and was now on remand. Further evidence from the hospital as to his access to supplies of arsenical drugs had been forthcoming. He would certainly be committed for trial.

Mercer sat back in his chair. A water-tight case. Sentences began to form in his mind. "This Dr. Czissar, Sir Charles, is merely a time-wasting crank. He's a refugee and his sufferings have probably unhinged him a little. If you could put the matter to Sir Herbert, in that light . . ."

And then, for the second time that afternoon, Dr. Czissar was announced.

Mercer was angry, yet, as Dr. Czissar came into the room, he became conscious of a curious feeling of friendliness toward him. It was not entirely the friendliness that one feels toward an enemy one is about to destroy. In his mind's eye he had been picturing Dr. Czissar as an ogre. Now, Mercer saw that, with his mild eyes behind their thick spectacles, his round, pale face, his drab raincoat and his unfurled umbrella, Dr. Czissar was, after all, merely pathetic. When, just inside the door, Dr. Czissar stopped, clapped his umbrella to his side as if it were a rifle, and said loudly: "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague Police. At your service." Mercer very nearly smiled.

Instead he said: "Sit down, doctor. I am sorry I was too busy to see you earlier."

"It is so good of you . . ." began Dr. Czissar earnestly.

"Not at all, doctor. You want, I hear, to compliment us on our handling of the Brock Park case."

Dr. Czissar blinked. "Oh, no, Assistant Commissioner Mercer," he said anxiously. "I would like to compliment, but it is too early, I think. I do not wish to seem impolite, but . . ."

Mercer smiled complacently. "Oh, we shall convict our man, all right,

doctor. I don't think you need to worry."

Dr. Czissar's anxiety became painful to behold. "Oh, but I do worry. You see —" He hesitated diffidently. "— he is not guilty."

Mercer hoped that the smile with which he greeted the statement did not reveal his secret exultation. He said blandly, "Are you aware, doctor, of all the evidence against him?"

"I attended the inquest," said Dr. Czissar mournfully. "But there will be more evidence from the hospital, no doubt. This young Mr. Harold could no doubt have stolen enough arsenic to poison a regiment without the loss being discovered."

The fact that the words had been taken out of his mouth disconcerted Mercer only slightly. He nodded. "Exactly."

A faint, thin smile stretched the doctor's full lips. He settled his glasses on his nose. Then he cleared his throat, swallowed hard and leaned forward. "Attention, please," he said sharply.

For some reason that he could not fathom, Mercer felt his self-confidence ooze suddenly away. He had seen that same series of actions, ending with the peremptory demand for attention, performed once before, and it had been the prelude to humiliation, to . . . He pulled himself up sharply. The Brock Park case was water-tight. He was being absurd.

"I'm listening," he said.

"Good." Dr. Czissar wagged one solemn finger. "According to the medical evidence given at the inquest, arsenic was found in the liver, kidneys and spleen. No?"

Mercer nodded firmly. "One point seven five one grains. That shows that much more than a fatal dose had been administered. Much more."

Dr. Czissar's eyes gleamed. "Ah, yes. Much more. It is odd, is it not, that so much was found in the kidneys?"

"Nothing odd at all about it."

"Let us leave the point for the moment. Is it not true, Assistant Commissioner Mercer, that all post-mortem tests for arsenic are for arsenic itself and not for any particular arsenic salt?"

Mercer frowned. "Yes, but it's unimportant. All arsenic salts are deadly poisons. Besides, when arsenic is absorbed by the human body, it turns to the sulphide. I don't see what you are driving at, doctor."

"My point is this, assistant commissioner, that usually it is impossible to tell from a delayed autopsy which form of arsenic was used to poison the body. You agree? It might be arsenious oxide, or one of the arsenates or arsenites, copper arsenite, for instance; or it might be a chloride, or it might be an organic compound of arsenic."

"Precisely."

"But," continued Dr. Czissar, "what sort of arsenic should we expect to find in a hospital, eh?"

Mercer pursed his lips. "I see no harm in telling you, doctor, that Harold Medley could easily have se-

cured supplies of either salvarsan or neosalvarsan. They are both important drugs."

"Yes, indeed," said Dr. Czissar. "Very useful in one-tenth of a gram doses, but very dangerous in larger quantities." He stared at the ceiling. "Have you seen any of Helena Merlin's paintings, assistant commissioner?"

The sudden change of subject took Mercer unawares. He hesitated. Then: "Oh, you mean Mrs. Medley. No, I haven't seen any of her paintings."

"Such a chic, attractive woman," said Dr. Czissar. "After I had seen her at the inquest I could not help wishing to see some of her work. I found some in a gallery near Bond St." He sighed. "I had expected something clever, but I was disappointed. She paints what she thinks instead of what is."

"Really? I'm afraid, doctor, that I must . . ."

"I felt," persisted Dr. Czissar, bringing his cowlike eyes once more to Mercer's, "that the thoughts of a woman who thinks of a field as blue and of a sky as emerald green must be a little strange."

"Modern stuff, eh?" said Mercer shortly. "I don't much care for it, either. And now, doctor, if you've finished, I'll ask you to excuse me. I . . ."

"Oh, but I have not finished yet," said Dr. Czissar kindly. "I think, assistant commissioner, that a woman who paints a landscape with a green sky is not only strange, but also interesting, don't you? I asked the gentlemen at the gallery about her. She produces only a few pictures — about six a year. He offered to sell me one of them for 15 guineas. She earns £100 a year from her work. It is wonderful how expensively she dresses on that sum."

"She had a rich husband."

"Oh, yes. A curious household, don't you think? The daughter Janet is especially curious. I was so sorry that she was so much upset by the evidence at the inquest."

"A young woman probably would be upset at the idea of her brother being a murderer," said Mercer drily.

"But to accuse herself so violently of the murder. That was odd."

"Hysteria. You get a lot of it in murder cases." Mercer stood up and held out his hand. "Well, doctor, I'm sorry you haven't been able to upset our case this time. If you'll leave your address with the sergeant as you go, I'll see that you get a pass for the trial," he added with relish.

But Dr. Czissar did not move. "You are going to try this young man for murder, then?" he said slowly. "You have not understood what I have been hinting at?"

Mercer grinned. "We've got something better than hints, doctor — a first-class circumstantial case against young Medley. Motive, time and method of administration, source of the poison. Concrete evidence, doctor! Juries like it. If you can produce one scrap of evidence to show that we've got the wrong man, I'll be

glad to hear it."

Dr. Czissar's back straightened, and his cowlike eyes flashed. He said, sharply, "I, too, am busy. I am engaged on a work on medical jurisprudence. I desire only to see justice done. I do not believe that on the evidence you have you can convict this young man under English law; but the fact of his being brought to trial could damage his career as a doctor. Furthermore, there is the real murderer to be considered. Therefore, in a spirit of friendliness, I have come to you instead of going to Harold Medley's legal advisers. I will now give you your evidence."

Mercer sat down again. He was very angry. "I am listening," he said grimly; "but if you . . ."

"Attention, please," said Dr. Czissar. He raised a finger. "Arsenic was found in the dead man's kidneys. It is determined that Harold Medley could have poisoned his father with either salvarsan or neosalvarsan. There is a contradiction there. Most inorganic salts of arsenic, white arsenic, for instance, are practically insoluble in water, and if a quantity of such a salt had been administered, we might expect to find traces of it in the kidneys. Salvarsan and neosalvarsan, however, are compounds of arsenic and are very soluble in water. If either of them had been administered through the mouth, we should *not* expect to find arsenic in the kidneys."

He paused; but Mercer was silent.

"In what form, therefore, was the arsenic administered?" he went on. "The tests do not tell us, for they detect only the presence of the element, arsenic. Let us then look among the inorganic salts. There is white arsenic, that is arsenious oxide. It is used for dipping sheep. We would not expect to find it in Brock Park. But Mr. Medley was a gardener. What about sodium arsenite, the weed-killer? But we heard at the inquest that the weed-killer in the garden was of the kind harmful only to weeds. We come to copper arsenite. Mr. Medley was, in my opinion, poisoned by a large dose of copper arsenite."

"Andon whatevidence," demanded Mercer, "do you base that opinion?"

"There is, or there has been, copper arsenite in the Medleys' house." Dr. Czissar looked at the ceiling. "On the day of the inquest, Mrs. Medley wore a fur coat. I have since found another fur coat like it. The price of the coat was 400 guineas. Inquiries in Brock Park have told me that this lady's husband, besides being a rich man, was also a very mean and unpleasant man. At the inquest, his son told us that he had kept his marriage a secret because he was afraid that his father would stop his allowance or prevent his continuing his studies in medicine. Helena Medley had expensive tastes. She had married this man so that she could indulge them. He had failed her. That coat she wore, assistant commissioner, was unpaid for. You will find, I think, that she had other debts, and that a threat had been made by one of the creditors to approach her husband. She was

tired of this man so much older than she was — this man who did not even justify his existence by spending his fortune on her. She poisoned her husband. There is no doubt of it."

"The commissioner to speak to you, sir," said the operator.

"All right. Hello . . . Hello, Sir Charles. Yes, I did want to speak to you urgently. It was —" He hesitated. "— it was about the Brock Park case. I think that we will have to release young Medley. I've got hold of some new medical evidence that . . . Yes, yes, I realize that, Sir Charles, and I'm very sorry that . . . All right, Sir Charles, I'll come immediately."

He replaced the telephone and went.

"Nonsense!" said Mercer. "Of course we know that she was in debt. We are not fools. But lots of women are in debt. It doesn't make them murderers. Ridiculous!"

"All murderers are ridiculous," agreed Dr. Czissar solemnly; "especially the clever ones."

"But how on earth . . .?" began Mercer.

Dr. Czissar smiled gently. "It was the spinach that the dead man had for luncheon before the symptoms of poisoning began that interested me," he said. "Why give spinach when it is out of season? Canned vegetables are not usually given to an invalid with gastric trouble. And then, when I saw Mrs. Medley's paintings, I understood. The emerald sky, assistant commissioner. It was a fine, rich emerald green, that sky — *the sort of emerald green that the artist gets when there is aceto-arsenite of copper in the paint!* The firm which supplies Mrs. Medley with her working materials will be able to tell you when she bought it. I suggest, too, that you take the picture — it is in the Summons Gallery — and remove a little of the sky for analysis. You will find that the spinach was prepared at her suggestion and taken to her husband's bedroom by her. Spinach is *green* and *slightly bitter* in taste. *So is copper arsenite.*" He sighed. "If there had not been anonymous letters . . ."

"Ah!" interrupted Mercer. "The anonymous letters! Perhaps you know . . ."

"Oh, yes," said Dr. Czissar simply. "The daughter Janet wrote them. Poor child! She disliked her smart stepmother and wrote them out of spite. Imagine her feelings when she found that she had — how do you say? — put a noose about her brother's throat. It would be natural for her to try to take the blame herself." He looked at his watch. "But it is late and I must get to the museum reading-room before it closes." He stood up, clapped his umbrella to his side, clicked his heels and said loudly: "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague Police. At your service!"

Little Willie Stanley, now Lieutenant Colonel Stanley of the U.S. Air Corps, was once a pupil of Hildegarde Withers, Schoolteacher-Sleuth. So when the woman he loved got into trouble, it was natural for Little Willie to turn to his former schoolma'am for help. He explained it this way: "Well, of course Deirdre knew that you were a friend of mine, and she had read about your hobby of messing in criminal cases and showing up the police—" At which the long-suffering Inspector Piper choked, and then blamed it hastily on his cigar.

"The Riddle of the Twelve Amethysts" is the first of a series of brand-new Hildegarde Withers adventures — frolics in ferreting — written especially for EQMM. The second in the series — "The Riddle of the Black Museum" — will appear soon.

As Robert Browning did not say in PIPPA PASSES: *"Hildy's in her heaven: All's right with the world." Yes, all's right in the Land of Detectivania — that super-duper snooper, that homicide-hunting Hildy is back!*

THE RIDDLE OF THE TWELVE AMETHYSTS

by STUART PALMER

"I OBSERVE, Oscar, that you have cashed in on some of your war bonds," said Miss Hildegarde Withers. The maiden schoolteacher spoke without looking up from the casserole out of which she was dishing up a savory mixture of pork chops, tomatoes, herbs, and rice.

The Inspector squinted at her. "Since when did you get a crystal ball?"

"It's quite elementary, really. I happen to be aware that for more than two years you have been setting aside a painfully large portion of your weekly salary for bonds. Today I see that you have relapsed into extravagant habits. The cigar in your mouth has a far more fragrant odor than the stogies which you have lately been consuming. You are wearing a new suit, which fits you around the shoulders. Moreover, you arrived in a taxi instead of coming uptown by subway as usual. That last fact is obvious because you are only fifteen minutes late for dinner instead of the usual half-hour or more. Coffee, or milk?"

"Milk, please." The Inspector sat himself carefully down at the somewhat rickety kitchenette table, and tucked a paper napkin into the top of his vest. "Your sleuthing isn't so bad," he congratulated her. "Only I didn't have to sell a bond. I just happened to hit a horse at Bowie. A two-year-old filly named Shoplifter, and with that name I had to put a sawbuck on her nose. She romped in and paid a potful."

"Then I think we might have gone out to somenicerestaurantfordinner," Miss Withers pointed out somewhat tartly. "Only of course we couldn't, because we wouldn't be back in time. I forgot to tell you, but the reason

for my asking you over especially this evening was because I am having a visitor I want you to meet — a former pupil of mine, little Willie Stanley. He's been away for awhile, in the Army or Navy or something. But he called up today and said he wanted to see me. I sensed something urgent in his voice, so I asked him if he would please come over around eight."

"Okay. Always glad to chew the fat with returned veterans. I was over in France myself in 1918, you know, and I —"

"You're not going to inflict your reminiscences on Willie. I have an idea that he is in some sort of trouble, or perhaps he has something on his conscience and wants advice." She started, as there came a buzz from downstairs.

"Dear me!" Swiftly Miss Withers set about pushing the bridge lamp so that its light from a tilted shade fell full into the face of anyone sitting in the easy chair. Then she pressed the button, opening the downstairs door, and in a moment there was the sound of quick, impetuous feet in the hallway and a hammering on the knocker.

"Willie!" she cried as she opened the door. "Little Willie Stanley, as I live and breathe! Come in, come in. I want you to meet Mr. Piper, an old friend of mine."

The Inspector winced slightly at the "mister" and winced again when he saw that Little Willie Stanley topped him by three inches, and wore the uniform of a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Corps. They shook hands, and Piper tried to decipher the meaning of the two rows of bright-colored campaign ribbons on the young man's chest.

Stanley looked surprised and ill at ease. "It's good to see you, ma'am. And to meet your friend. I'm sorry if I'm busting in on something. I'll come back. I'm in no hurry."

"Of course you're in no hurry," pointed out Miss Withers dryly. "That's why you arrived twenty minutes ahead of time. Go on, young man, you may speak freely. I'm well aware that this is something more than a social call."

"Right as usual," he admitted, sinking down on the divan where the Inspector was already established. That left Miss Withers no choice but to plant herself in the chair by the glaring lamp, and so she sat there, not without a sidewise glance at Oscar Piper, who was grinning at her.

"Well," began Stanley hesitantly, "it's really none of my affair."

"Take note, Oscar, that when a man says an affair is really none of his, the exact opposite is usually true. Suppose, Willie, that you begin at the beginning, go on until you come to the end —"

"And then stop," young Stanley completed the quotation for her. "Okay. But it all starts with what happened more than two years ago, on my last leave back home."

"I remember!" Miss Withers brightened. "You got married then, didn't you? I believe I received an invitation to the wedding."

"A wedding that conked out on the

take-off, and did a ground loop. At the last minute my leave was cancelled, and I had to get back to the job of chasing Japs out of the sky. Deirdre — she took it hard. So hard that she went right out and married a 4F. But she wrote me a letter —"

"Oh, yes," interrupted the schoolteacher. "A 'Dear Joe' letter, isn't that what men in the Service call them?"

He grinned and shook his head. "No, she was too bashful to write and tell me then. I had to hear about it from a friend, roundabout. She turned me down for a paper-box manufacturer, married him and his factory, and settled down out in East Plattville, Pennsylvania. Imagine a girl named Deirdre Fitzgibbon changing it to Mrs. George Schlupper!" He shrugged. "I guess at the time I minded the Schlupper part of it more than anything else. But to get back to the letter. It came just last week, right after I got back to town. . . ."

"And in it the lady told you how much she repented of her choice?"

He flushed. "Not at all. Of course, you can read between the lines."

"I should like to do so," said Miss Withers, and held out her hand.

The young man made a faint movement toward his pocket, and then shook his head. He stared at his shoelaces as if they interested him. "Sorry, but I didn't think to bring the letter with me. Anyway, she said that she is in need of help. She had heard that I was back — read some publicity about a manuscript I knocked together out in Australia, between missions. And she — well, of course Deirdre knew that you were a friend of mine, and she had read about your hobby of messing in criminal cases and showing up the police —"

The Inspector choked, and then hastily blamed it on his cigar.

"And anyway, she wanted me to get in touch with you, ma'am, and see if you could do a little quiet, unofficial investigating."

Miss Withers shook her head definitely. "Willie, I'm sorry, but I never felt that divorce cases were quite the field for my talents, such as they are. Now a nice murder puzzle, an embezzlement, something like that —"

The young man flushed again. "Oh, no. You got me wrong. Deirdre is plenty loyal to her husband, though he isn't in her class. Her real fear is that he is being driven out of his mind."

"Nor am I qualified as an alienist. I suggest —"

"Wait a minute. What would you say is the foulest of all crimes?"

"Kidnaping," suggested the Inspector.

But Miss Withers shook her head. "I'd say blackmail."

"That's it." Stanley took a beautiful gold lighter from his pocket, blazoned with the arms of the Australian Commonwealth, and set fire to a cigarette. "You see, somebody has been sending George Schlupper an amethyst on the first of each month. To date five of them have been delivered. Each time one comes, the

fellow goes into a spin, so Deirdre says. He is so panicky and snappish that she doesn't dare to question him. But she is half nuts herself. She's simply got to find out what is behind it all."

Miss Withers looked at the Inspector. "Oscar," she said, "I think you must agree with me that this needs looking into. The game is afoot."

Both men stared at her blankly. "It's from Sherlock Holmes," she admitted. "I've been re-reading him lately."

The Inspector scowled. "Just a minute, Colonel. Amethysts are valuable stones. What makes you think that blackmail is tied up with this?"

"Only that Deirdre knows that each month, after the receipt of the package, her husband draws cash and still more cash from his bank accounts. The paperbox factory used to be a gold mine, but now it's tottery."

"And the lady has no idea as to the underlying causes of all this?"

"Not exactly. But she has her suspicions, naturally. You see, a year or two ago they had a maid working in the household, name of Lily Wheeler. It seems she was all tramp and a yard wide, though only about eighteen. She finally got fired, just a few days before Deirdre's first wedding anniversary. That was the day Deirdre thought she was going to be given a certain necklace that she had admired in Black, Starr & Gorham's window while she and her husband were on a weekend in New York. It was an amethyst necklace, with twelve stones. But instead of getting the present she'd set her heart on, she got a string of inexpensive amber beads."

"And I suppose," asked Miss Withers thoughtfully, "that her husband gave no explanation of his change in plans?"

"Deirdre could hardly complain. After all, it was just a hunch on her part that maybe he had bought the necklace after all, then had to give it to Lily Wheeler to sort of buy her off when she left."

"I see," said the schoolteacher. "Very interesting, eh, Oscar?"

Piper agreed. "I don't think I ever before heard of a blackmailer breaking up a valuable necklace and sending back the stones. Lily's unique."

"Unique, indeed," decided Miss Withers. "By the way, Willie, did the lady catch a glimpse of the postmark on the packages which upset her husband?"

He nodded. "They were all sent from Acapulco, Mexico. That's where I — where Deirdre wants you to go. It's a delicate job, but somebody has to track down that Wheeler dame and find out what hold she's got on George."

The Inspector turned to Miss Withers. "Why not, Hildegarde? The west coast of Mexico wouldn't be bad, this time of year. You could get leave."

"Perhaps I could arrange a substitute. By the way, Willie, where are you staying?"

"The Astor. I've got to be in town until we get the contracts for my book

settled. It's to be called *Seventeen Missions over Nippon.* My leave lasts another two weeks, and then I have the choice of going back to a desk job at the base down under, or staying at Wright Field as an instructor in high level bombing. I was planning to go back, but now —"

"Now Deirdre seems to be coming back into your life? Very well, young man. I'll get in touch with you at your hotel. Meanwhile, I advise you to keep away from East Plattville, Pennsylvania, until you hear from me."

When the door had closed upon the young flyer, Miss Withers turned to her old friend and sparring partner. "Well, what do you make of it?"

"The boy's still in love with her. Didn't want you to see the letter because it was probably hotter than a two-dollar pistol. Maybe you would be doing young love a big favor if you uncovered the scandal in the Schlupper household, and got the girl loose from her stinker of a husband."

"Perhaps I might, at that," admitted the schoolteacher. "Oscar, will you do me a great favor and take a trip with me tomorrow?"

"I will not. You must be out of your head to suggest my scooting off to Mexico."

"Who said anything about Mexico? I meant East Plattville. That is where Lily Wheeler disappeared, and that is where to take up her trail. It should be very easy to follow. I believe that there is a train from Paddington — I mean Grand Central Station —at ten in the morning. Will you meet me at the Information Booth? And Oscar, it might be well if you brought along your service revolver."

"Okay, okay. But stop talking like Sherlock Holmes, will you?"

She sniffed. "It helps me to get into the spirit of the thing. And Oscar, you do make such a perfect Watson."

"Thanks," he said, as he started out. Then he turned, doing a double-take. "Watson? So I'm to be a stooge, huh? I'm to go around wide-eyed with amazement every time you deduce something?"

"That, Oscar, is the tradition. If the shoe fits, put it on."

The Inspector was still fuming a little when he came into Grand Central Station shortly before ten next morning, but his disgruntled expression changed to one of incredulous hilarity when he saw what was awaiting him there.

It was, and yet was not, Miss Hildegarde Withers. He looked upon a tall and angular woman wrapped in a ratty lapin coat. Upon her head, instead of the usual Queen Maryish hat, was sported a sequin turban, from beneath which peeked curls of an unearthly henna shade. Worst of all, rouge and full make-up had been applied to her face with a generous hand.

"Hildegarde," said Oscar Piper firmly, "in that outfit I'd send the Vice Squad to raid any house you lived in."

"Never you mind," the schoolteacher told him. "I've always wanted to try my hand at disguise. Don't

you understand? Lily Wheeler must have a mother. That's me — I mean, I. Who indeed has a better right to inquire into her disappearance?"

"Okay. But — look here, Hildegarde. You're not expecting me —"

"Expecting you to play the part of the girl's father? Relax, Oscar. Your part is a less arduous one. I'll coach you about it on the train, which we are about to miss unless you stop gaping at me and come along."

Once comfortably settled in a compartment, the schoolteacher eyed him severely and began. "I have observed, Oscar, that there are three major kinds of liars. First, we have the liar who desperately invents falsehoods *ex tempore*, and whose haphazardly-created structure vanishes like soap bubbles at the first touch. Secondly, we have the career liar, who invents for the sheer love of it, who has a genius for creative falsehood as an artist has a genius for music, for sculpture, or for cookery. But perhaps the most difficult, the most convincing of all, is the person who tells the truth, with wide honest eyes and the ring of conviction, and yet who deftly inserts in the center of that truth one small but vital falsehood."

"You still sound like Sherlock Holmes," the Inspector complained. "Are you trying to tell me that Colonel Stanley was lying, and him an officer and a gentleman by act of Congress? Why?"

"In due time, Oscar. There is no use in trying to resolve an equation without all the factors. Nor in rushing off to the ends of the earth just because someone is obviously anxious to have you do so. It occurred to me that perhaps it was not my presence in Acapulco that was so much desired, as my absence here. We should be in East Plattville around four-thirty. And when we get there —"

The Inspector leaned back wearily, listening both to Miss Withers and to the monotonous clickety-clack of the train wheels over the rails. They began to blend harmoniously together. . . .

"Wake up, Sleeping Beauty," he heard Miss Withers saying, after what seemed a lapse of only a few moments. "We're almost there. Oscar, I am very happy that I never married you, for you snore like a saw-mill."

They descended from the train at what appeared to be a whistle-stop somewhere in the bedraggled wilds of the Pennsylvania coal country. The main street of the town faced upon the railroad tracks, its two-story buildings streaked with grime and coal smoke which settled down steadily, mixed with a chilly rain. To Inspector Oscar Piper, who like most New Yorkers felt that every place west of the Hudson River was part of the Great American Desert, the town looked like a stage-set already destined for Cain's warehouse.

But he was in for it now. Obediently he carried their luggage to the bus which deposited them at the Plattville House, and then made arrangements for a taxi which hauled them a mile or so farther, through

cramped and dismal suburbs, until they came to a little boulevard running north through a half-built subdivision. At the far end of the street the lights of a large and ugly stone house, dating perhaps from the first Roosevelt, gleamed dully.

"Remember, Oscar, you are playing the part of a lawyer," Miss Withers reminded him. "Lily's mother, meaning me, has retained you in an effort to locate her strayed lamb. I suggest that you let me do most of the talking."

"As if I ever had any choice in that!" he muttered. But he listened while she coached him in the few speeches she thought would be necessary, and at last they stood before the doorway of the place. After the third ring at the bell, the door was opened by a hatchet-faced maid who glared at them suspiciously.

The woman seemed very reluctant to admit them, and as they cooled their heels in the doorway Miss Withers heard a clear feminine voice from the head of the stairs. "Betty! If that is the telegram I am expecting, bring it up here right away."

The maid turned. "No, ma'am. Just somebody to see the mister." She beckoned, and the visitors were led into a long narrow living room, filled with heavy over-stuffed furniture. The walls were heavily-ornamented with reproductions of such well-known paintings as *The End of the Trail* and *Innocence*. The schoolteacher looked at once toward the bookcases and the library table, but turned her gaze away again as she saw that the books stacked there were limp-leather editions of the Rubaiyat, of Elbert Hubbard, and massive sets of The World's Classics.

"Whatever our hostess is like," decided Miss Withers, "she has little or no resistance to book agents." Then, playing her part to the hilt, she seated herself primly on the edge of a hard chair, presenting a perfect picture of Tenth Avenue womanhood intent upon getting its rights or knowing the reason why.

They waited only a few minutes, and then the door opened and a man entered, peering myopically through thick lenses. Miss Withers started, like a frightened horse. This was by no means the lusty and violent man she had pictured George Schlupper to be. He was no more than five feet in height, weighed perhaps 140 in his clothes, and there was an untidy dribble of cigarette ash on his vest.

"Yes?" he greeted them dubiously. "Just what do you want, please?"

"I want my daughter!" announced Miss Withers firmly. "My little Lily!"

The Inspector thought that she was over-playing. "I am Oscar Piper, of Piper, Folsom, Hardy and Hardy," he hastily interposed. "This is Mrs. Wheeler, who has retained our firm in an effort to locate her missing daughter, who I am given to understand, was last heard from while employed in your household."

Schlupper hesitated, swallowing. "I believe—" he said, and stopped. "Why, there was a girl of that name,

but she — she left us more than two years ago. I'm afraid I can tell you nothing more. They come — and they go."

"Oh, do they?" cried Miss Withers. "Well, my Lily left here under a cloud, with her good name ruined. And where is she now, you — you wolf?"

"I really —" Schlupper scowled, and then closed his mouth firmly. But he was beginning to blush, the Inspector noticed.

"Forgive my client's natural anxiety," he put in. "But there is also the matter of an insurance policy."

Schlupper's face cleared a little, and then he rose uneasily. "I really don't see how I can tell you anything that would be of the slightest help," he said doggedly. "But perhaps — perhaps you could speak to my wife?" He turned toward the door and raised his voice. "Dee? Dee, could you come here a moment?"

As if that had been a cue, the door opened again and a woman entered. The Inspector caught his breath as he saw her, for she was that sort of woman. Tall, with a cream-white skin, brilliantly blue eyes, and hair so black that it seemed almost purple. "Now there is one well named for Erin's loveliest and most unhappy queen," he whispered to nobody in particular. Miss Withers scowled at him. Then she took the bull by the horns, and leaped into an explanation of their visit. Deirdre Schlupper listened, and then coolly shook her lovely head. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Wheeler, but I can't help you. It isn't likely that your daughter would have been in contact with us when not even her own mother knows her whereabouts."

"That's as it may be," said Miss Withers stoutly. "Just one postcard I've got from her since she left home, and that from Mexico City. Why would a daughter of mine be going off to foreign places like that, I'd like to know?" The Inspector was watching Deirdre as his companion spoke, and he imagined that the beautiful white face blanched a little whiter still at the mention of the southern capital. But she did not speak.

Miss Withers stood up, looking down her nose with such an air of spurious dignity that it was hard for the Inspector to realize that she was other than the frowzy beldame she portrayed. "Thank you, ma'am," she was saying. "Come, Mr. Piper. It's plain to see that there's nothing more to be learned here. Sorry to have troubled you, Mrs. Schlupper. Good-night to you."

But once the door had closed on them, and they were out in the cold and the rain again, the schoolteacher seemed to lose her haste to be on their way. She hesitated upon the path.

"Very odd, Oscar. Very odd indeed."

"You're darned right. I can't figure it out. Of course, the important point is the whereabouts of this round-heeled little maid. If she isn't down at Acapulco —"

"Don't be ridiculous. Of all the places in this world, Acapulco is the

least likely haven for that missing young lady. As a matter of fact, her present address is really of no moment. The problem which presents itself is that of —"

"Of the location of the amethyst necklace?"

Miss Withers looked at him, and then shook her head with discouragement. "Come, Oscar." She set off down the street. Since their taxi had departed without them, they were faced with a long and lonely walk back toward the heart of town.

"You may as well know, Oscar," continued the schoolma'am, "that I do not care a fig about the whereabouts of the amethyst necklace or its remnants. Nor the present whereabouts of Lily Wheeler. I am interested only in murder."

"Whoa there! Wait a minute! Are you telling me that we're investigating a murder two years old?"

"Murder is murder, whether it happens today or year before last or tomorrow. Nor is it covered by the statute of limitations. I grant you that from one point of view, it simply amounts to hastening one of the most natural and inevitable of all human changes. Yet homicide is rightly held to be one of the most abhorrent of crimes. Life is dear, even to the least of us."

"Even to a hired girl like Lily Wheeler," Piper agreed, and was surprised by the look Miss Withers gave him.

"I might call your attention to some features of the Schlupper household," she continued, as they plodded along the winding boulevard. "The place is of considerable size, and obviously expensive. Yet from the flour upon the apron of the maid who opened the door to us, she is the only servant. The place showed other definite evidences of recent economy. Moreover, did you notice the periodicals on the table? There is someone in that house who never reads a book, but who has an avid interest in the doings of what is known as Society — of what goes on at Bar Harbor, Northampton, Aiken, and Santa Barbara."

"But not Acapulco?"

"Why —" Whatever Miss Withers was about to say was lost as she suddenly grabbed his arm. "Oscar, there comes a Western Union boy on a bicycle. I wonder —" She waved frantically. "Young man!"

The gangling youth slowed, and then put one scrawny leg down on the curb for balance. "It's about time you were here," Miss Withers said sternly. "The mistress sent us down to meet you. Here, I'll take that telegram and save you the rest of the ride up the hill."

He drew back. "Miz Wheeler maybe fifty cents gives!" protested the youth in what the Inspector realized must be the local version of Pennsylvania Dutch. He stared at them suspiciously, and then started pedalling up the hill for dear life.

"A clean miss," observed the Inspector.

She shrugged. "It was worth trying. But I think I can guess the contents

of the telegram that youth is bearing. But come along, we have a long haul before we find shelter at that horrible little hotel."

An hour later they were sitting in her dank little room at the Plattville House, a plate of under-cooked ham and eggs between them. The schoolteacher, much to Piper's relief and her own, had removed her bizarre make-up and otherwise changed back into her own personality. But she was so excited that she could barely finish her coffee.

"I wonder, Oscar, if you would be so kind as to see if there is a railway timetable downstairs? I'm interested in incoming trains."

"Huh? Oh, all right. This is your party, I guess." The Inspector wearily rose and went out. Twenty minutes later he was back, out of breath and grinning. "Hildegarde, guess what?"

"I don't want to play guessing games," she said severely. "Oscar, when is the next train from New York?"

He stiffened, like a hurt small boy. "Well, if you must know, there's an express due at seven in the morning — what they call the paper train. Then there's a local around eleven."

The schoolteacher nodded. "We rise early, Oscar. It will be the seven o'clock, I think."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Unless —" Miss Withers stared at him and her eyes twinkled. "Unless our man has already arrived? Was that what you came bursting in to tell me?"

Slightly deflated, the Inspector sank back into a chair. "Right as rain. A train arrived half an hour ago, and a man got off who answers to the description of our friend Stanley. I traced him by the uniform. I was going to pick him up and work him over a little, and then I found that he had taken the bus to this hotel. So —"

She caught his arm. "Oscar, don't tell me that you —"

"Relax, Hildegarde. I didn't speak to him, nor let him see me. I got back while he was registering, and shadowed him and the bellboy up the stairs. He's in the room at the end of the hall, by the way. I made sure of that and then went down and took a quick gander at the register. How do you suppose he signed himself?"

"Addison Sims of Seattle?"

"Practically. He is down as Lieut. Colonel Wilfred Parks."

"You see, Oscar, we are not the only visitors to East Plattville who prefer to remain incognito. What this means is that we are closer to the culmination of this little adventure than I had realized. Come, come, don't take off your coat and light a cigar. We have to retrace our footsteps. If you will hurry and find a taxi, we may be in time to prevent a murder!"

"Hold on to your hats, boys," muttered Oscar Piper. "Here we go again."

Miss Withers was waiting impatiently on the sidewalk when he finally appeared with the taxi. "You certainly took long enough," she said tartly as she climbed inside. Then she paused as she saw that there was an-

other man in the back seat, a large, patient-looking man wearing the uniform and badge of a deputy sheriff.

"Miss Withers," said the Inspector, "meet Deputy Sheriff Bowen. I asked him to come along. It's customary, in cases like this, to call on the local authorities. Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," said the schoolteacher. "And if I did, what good would it do?"

"Not much," said Bowen easily. "From what the Inspector tells me, you haven't got much to go on. But I guess I better string along just to keep you outa trouble."

"The usual way to combat a murderer," observed Miss Withers, "is to track him down *after* he has committed the deed. It is rare indeed for a detective, either in metropolitan New York or in small towns such as this, to have the opportunity of doing his work at the proper time, which is *before* the crime has been perpetrated."

Deputy Sheriff Bowen didn't say anything, but his eyes caught the Inspector's for a moment. They rode on in silence.

As they turned into the winding boulevard which led up toward the Schlupper house, Miss Withers peered out and nodded. "All looks just as it should look at this late hour. See, the lights are going out all over the house. But still —"

"But still we are going to stick our noses into it, eh?" Piper shrugged. "Better leave the taxi down here somewhere if you want to make a surprise attack."

They approached the house warily, and this time did not ring the bell but went carefully across the brown wet grass of the lawn, through the tangled briars of a neglected rose garden, until at last they came to a flagged terrace and stood where they could see, through partially drawn curtains, into the interior of the living room.

Twin lamps blazed on the desk, but there was nobody in view. They waited, while the chilly wind played with Miss Withers' ankles, for what seemed a very long time indeed. But at last there was a movement in the room. George Schlupper appeared, bearing an armful of what appeared to be account books and business papers. He was but a scant four or five yards from them, close enough so that Miss Withers could see the lines of anxiety in his rabbit-like face.

He plumped himself down at the table, and for a time busied himself with the accounts. "Don't look like he was fixing to murder anybody," observed Deputy Bowen in a hoarse whisper. "I guess —"

"Miss Withers has been right before," came back the Inspector. "And when she's wrong she is still worth watching. Stick around."

The man inside now rubbed his forehead, as if failing to make head or tail of the papers. He started to cram them into an expensive briefcase, and then impulsively pushed them aside, allowing them to flutter to the floor. He rose, disappeared from view, and then returned bearing what Miss Withers recognized with a start of horror

was a revolver. He stared at it a long time, and then, as if he had whipped his courage to the sticking point, he began to load it, with trembling fingers and a wild look in his eyes.

"Maybe we better—" began the deputy in a newly serious voice. But Miss Withers caught his arm, and they moved closer to the window.

Schlupper finished loading the pistol and then laid it down before him. He picked it up, then put it down again. He reached for the account books, opened one and then slammed it shut, and rubbed his forehead.

"I wish he'd make up his mind," whispered the Inspector. "It's cold out here."

Schlupper got up, walked around the table, and then sat down again. All of a sudden Miss Withers realized that he was crying. He blew his nose, and then his hand went automatically to the large cut-glass decanter which stood on the table nearby. "Going to brace himself with a little Dutch courage," whispered the Inspector. "Look at his hand tremble as he pours it. . . ."

"Quick, Oscar!" cried the schoolteacher. "Shoot, before he drinks it!"

But the two men only stared at her. Inside, Schlupper turned and raised the glass. . . .

Miss Withers took her umbrella handle and smashed the window, crying, "If you won't stop him I will!"

The tumbler dropped from George Schlupper's hand and for a moment the little man stood there, frozen. He turned toward the intruders, almost unseeing, as they burst into the room. They could hardly hear his whisper.

"She's gone," said George Schlupper, in mournful tones. "She's left me. I was going to end it all, but I didn't have the courage to pull the trigger."

Miss Withers was on her hands and knees, sniffing and then gingerly tasting the liquid which formed little pools amid the shards of glass and the crumpled paper on the floor. "Strychnine, I should think," she decided. "I suggest, sheriff, that you collect enough of this to permit an official analysis by the police laboratories. You had also better keep an eye on Mr. Schlupper here. The Inspector and I have other fish to fry."

"Hey, wait!" Deputy Bowen cried, but Miss Withers was half dragging the Inspector back through the window again.

"We may still be in time," she was crying. "If only that taxi driver will hurry. . . ."

The driver hurried, after Oscar Piper had showed his badge and promised to fix any possible ticket. It was only a few minutes more before they were rushing up the steps of the hotel and had burst into the door of the room at the end of the hall.

There they found Deirdre, the lovely queen of sorrows, in Colonel Stanley's arms. A woman's travelling case, of expensive alligator, stood nearby, and his bags had been placed by the door as if all were ready for an impending exit.

"Forgive the intrusion, Willie," said Miss Withers. "But we wanted to

bring Mrs. Schlupper news of her husband."

Deirdre stared at them, unflinchingly. "I don't know who you are — though this morning you pretended to be the mother of my former maid. But I can guess what you've come to tell me." She was looking at the Inspector, who gravely nodded.

"George has killed himself, then!" the woman went on. "I knewhe didn't have courage enough to go on after the collapse of his business. That's why I left him. I haven't courage enough for two. His suicide will surprise nobody who knew him."

Stanley started to speak, but Miss Withers imperiously shushed him. "The suicide will certainly be no surprise to Mrs. Schlupper," continued the schoolteacher, "because she must have suggested the idea to him."

There was an ugly silence. "I'm afraid," Deirdre said, "that you'll have difficulty in proving such an accusation." The cool blue eyes turned toward Stanley. "My dear, I seem to have involved you in my personal difficulties."

He shook his head, still bewildered. "But Miss Withers — I didn't think you and the Inspector. . . . I mean, I thought —"

"You thought that I was well on my way to Mexico, didn't you? So you sent Mrs. Schlupper a telegram saying that the coast was clear, and followed it down by the first train."

"No, I didn't. She wired me to come at once, and I answered saying that I would . . . but . . ."

"You'll be lucky if you're not held as an accessory after the fact, young man."

"An accessory after the fact of what, for God's sake? Is it illegal to elope?"

"As an accessory to the murder of George Schlupper," Miss Withers pronounced. The Inspector opened his mouth to speak, but felt her elbow jam him hard in the ribs.

The only sound in the little hotel room was a heartfelt sigh, as Deirdre released her breath. Somehow she seemed relieved, in spite of the accusation. Then she tensed again, turning toward the schoolteacher.

"Miss Withers, I had hoped that you were helping me in this difficulty. But you do not know my husband as I do. Or else you'd see that, even in his last hour, he tried his best to blacken and ruin the woman who had been his unhappy wife. He must somehow have contrived so that his death would cast suspicion on me, and perhaps drag me back from the elopement which was to have been my last slim chance for happiness and a new life."

"Stop the Hearts and Flowers music," said Miss Withers dryly. "I can understand that to you a life with a returned war hero, author of a future best seller and no doubt Hollywood success, looks more attractive than being buried in East Plattville. That is why, is it not, that you arranged to have me sent on a wild-goose chase? You hoped to murder your husband with only the local police to hoodwink, and you knew that being a

friend of Willie's I would interest myself in any suspicious death involving him in any way. But you made one mistake, Mrs. Schlupper."

"They all do," Piper said.

"Your mistake was to fail to realize that no servant girl would choose as her hideout a fashionable resort town in Mexico, a place lately rivalling Biarritz and Cannes with the smart set. Nor would such a girl conceive of mailing amethysts to her former employer. In fact, that detail trapped you — for you yourself admitted having seen the supposed postmark."

"But Lily Wheeler —" began Deirdre breathlessly.

"Was a maid actually in your husband's employ? I never doubted it, nor the fact that you objected to her flirtations with him. For that matter I have no doubt but that the amethyst necklace is in your travelling bag, having never been broken up at all."

The woman did not answer, but in spite of herself her eyes flicked toward the case. "That isn't true, Deirdre," put in Stanley quickly. "Open it and show them!"

"I refuse! I won't be humiliated—"

"No matter," Miss Withers said. "You have made many mistakes in this affair. But your greatest mistake was to forget that if your husband had planned to take strychnine with suicidal intent, as the lawyers word it, he would have put the poison *in the glass — not in the decanter!*"

The woman collapsed upon the bed, like a puppet whose strings had all come loose. Her hoarse, bitter sobbing filled the room. Stanley looked like a man who had been reprieved from the scaffold in the nick of time.

"Miss Withers — Inspector —" he blurted out. "I don't know what to say."

"You'd better say 'goodbye' and right now," the Inspector told him dryly. "Because it might not be so clear to the local authorities, as it is to us, that you were playing the innocent patsy in this mess. Thanks to Miss Withers here, the murder wasn't completed. My advice to you —"

"Willie, you listen to me," Miss Withers put in. "Go back to Australia and that job as operations officer. I've a hunch you have a girl there, too. . . ."

He looked bewildered. "I have. I mean — well, she's an Aussie nurse. Wonderful girl, too. Only —"

"I figured that your gold lighter was a present no man would buy for himself," Miss Withers said, as she pushed him bodily out of the door, bags and all. Then she turned to the Inspector. "Oscar, I leave the rest of this unhappy business to you. And thank you for letting me for once play out a case my own way."

He looked at her sheepishly. "I was just letting you have rope enough to fall on your own face. I figured it would be a lesson to you."

She bridled, and then smiled. "You get 100 for frankness, anyway."

Your Editor is convinced that he will never publish a story by boy-author James Yaffe without having something utterly amazing to say about it. Let me give you, for example, the history of Master Yaffe's fourth story about detective Paul Dawn and his Department of Impossible Crimes.

The typewritten manuscript reached your Editor by mail. The manuscript was immediately identifiable as having been typed by Master Yaffe himself — the characteristic heavy touch, the individual punctuation, the recognizable margining, and so on. Your Editor read the story promptly — and a deep furrow cracked his brow. After considerable mulling we picked up the phone and called our favorite boy-author.

"Jimmy," we asked, "how much do you trust our editorial judgment?"

"Absolutely," replied Jimmy.

"Then I suggest that we do not publish your new story."

"Is it that bad?" asked Jimmy.

We proceeded to discuss the story in all its painful details. What an author-after-an-Editor's-heart young Jimmy is! He agreed with every criticism your Editor catapulted into the phone.

"Okay," he decided, "tear it up."

But your Editor is one of those strange creatures who is not content to fire destructive criticism alone. Our editorial gun is double-barreled. We pressed the other trigger and fired a volley of constructive criticism. *The basic plot device, we contended, was worth saving; now, if you do such-and-such, change this to that, revolve the story around so-and-so —*

Master Yaffe saw the new possibilities faster than he heard them. Yes, he would do a complete overhauling. Your Editor had suggested the generalities — it was up to Jimmy to work out the specific details and dovetail them into a brand-new plot.

In a remarkably short time a new manuscript arrived by mail. Again it was readily identifiable as having been typed by Master Yaffe himself — the same Yaffean trademarks. And this time your Editor read the story and found it very good indeed.

But what is so "utterly amazing" about all this? Nothing so far — merely the history of a perfect author-and-editor relationship. But your Editor has neglected to mention two points.

One: At the time your Editor received the first draft, young Jimmy was sick in bed, flat on his back, and being watched by a nurse.

Two: At the time your Editor received the completely revised story, young Jimmy was still sick in bed, still flat on his back, and still being watched by a nurse!

How had Jimmy written a whole new story while bedridden and under the eyes of a nurse? We can understand how he planned the new story: he lay back in his bed, eyes closed, and jigsawed each piece of

the new plot into position. The nurse would think he was sleeping; even if she suspected he wasn't, you can't stop a patient from thinking. *But how did Jimmy actually* type *the new manuscript? By what guile or ingenuity did young Jimmy persuade the nurse that typing a twenty-odd page manuscript was conducive — nay, essential — to his recovery? And what of the doctor? Was the typewriter slung under the bed every time the doctor's footsteps were heard outside the sick room?*

Remember how Paul Dawn described young Oscar Kung in "Mr. Kiroshibu's Ashes"? "What a kid!" That's our Jimmy!

CUL DE SAC

by JAMES YAFFE

"You look so pleased, Inspector. When is the blood going to flow?"

The Inspector looked at him with a great display of innocence. "Why, you talk as if you believed I was going to make an arrest or something."

Paul Dawn leaned back in his chair and chuckled tolerantly. "Come off it, Fledge. This is old Paul you're talking to. I know that fiendish leer. I can remember the days when you asked the Chief to let you handle only the cases with the mangled bodies."

Inspector Stanley Fledge of the New York Homicide Squad grunted, and his bald spot reddened slightly. "All right, you've hit the nail on the nose. I'm about to sweep in on the kill, and it's got me tickled pink. I get so little chance to do that sort of thing since they've stuck me behind a desk."

"Who," asked Paul Dawn, "is the lucky prey?"

A frown crossed Inspector Fledge's face. "A rat," he said in a voice that made quite clear his dislike of that species of animal life. "And the rotten thing about this rat is he's all dressed up in a fur-lined coat, a dozen diamond rings, a Sulka tie, a college degree, and just stinks with respectability."

"I take it you look forward to snipping him in two with the scissors of the law?"

"Very metaphorical. That's right. I'm licking my chops over the chance to fry some ratmeat. Give me a drink."

Paul Dawn sighed disconsolately. "An unending stream of police officers keeps flowing in and out of this office ever since I made it known I kept spirits handy. Our New York bloodhounds must be descended from St. Bernards. You'll find the brew in the filing cabinet." As Fledge went over to it, "The Scotch is under 'A' — 'Accessories'. The small glasses are under 'D' — 'Dead Letters' and the large glasses are under 'U' — 'Unfinished Business'. There's ice in the left-hand drawer of the desk."

Paul Dawn took a long drag from his cigarette and allowed a graceful smoke ring to slither into the open.

It was hard to believe that this gentle, rather vague young man, lover of crossword puzzles, addicted to fits of daydreaming, was the head of the D.I.C. — the Department of Impossible Crimes, an obscure office of the Homicide Squad — the foremost authority on murderers who disappeared as if by magic, corpses in impossible positions, and all the headaches that surround the "locked room."

When Fledge was settled, grinning like a slightly bald Cheshire Cat, Paul puffed at his cigarette and demanded some more information about the Inspector's rat.

"It's a routine problem, you know. Not up your alley at all."

"You wrong me, Inspector. I'm touched by all human suffering."

"Nothing touching about this specimen. Among other things, he's a spy and a traitor."

"Nazi?"

"Too slick to come out in the open and admit it. This fellow is what they call a pillar of society. Member of the 400. Member of the Stock Exchange. Member of the Elks, Masons, Rotarians, National Association of Manufacturers, and a dozen charity organizations, boards, and committees. It's through one of his committees that we suspect him of cooperating with Nazi spies."

"Sounds like a pleasant character. Does he have a name?"

"He has a lot of names. Robert Matthew Herbert Sinclair-Cummings." With a hyphen."

"Why the hyphen?"

Fledge said sourly, "You don't know Robert Matthew Sinclair-Cummings. He'd be naked without his hyphen."

"I think I've seen the gentleman's picture in the paper. It seems to me he's usually addressing women at flower shows."

"Robert Matthew is a great flower fancier. He collects thousand-dollar gardenias."

Paul Dawn closed his eyes and said in a faraway voice, "What sort of nefarious activity is he engaged in? Does he taint his gardenias with exotic Oriental poisons? Or is he lecturing the D.A.R. on how to be good Fascist *hausfraus* and support Peace Now?"

"This is no joke, Paul. The man's dangerous. Luckily we think we can pull his sting within a short time— but just the same — well, you don't know about the C.C.O.J.D."

"Is it a new slogan for a cigarette?"

"It's the Citizen's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. You must know — you couldn't help it unless you were a hermit holed up somewhere in the Eighth Avenue Subway — that the growth of robberies, assaults, even murders by kids from ten to sixteen is alarming. We suspect that there are people behind it, with a definite plan of action. These people are Fascist agitators who would like nothing better than to stop war production and generally throw things out of joint.

"The police have been active about stopping this organized crime wave. Among other things, there are plain clothesmen stationed in the sections

of town where the situation seems worse, scouting around to see who's egging the kids on. The Homicide Squad didn't come into it until recently when an undercover cop in one of the worst sections of the West Side was murdered. Harrington was a good man who would never have given himself away. Only the police knew who he was and what he was doing — only the police *and* the Citizen's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. Harrington's name happened to slip out accidentally in one of my conferences with the Citizen's Committee. The members of the committee and Mr. Sinclair-Cummings promised never to mention Harrington again. The next day Harrington was dead. We couldn't put our finger immediately on the leak, but we've been investigating for the last month. We think the leak is Robert Sinclair-Cummings."

"And you're on your way to lay a trap for him."

Fledge nodded happily. "I feel like a fisherman," he said, rubbing his hands together. "I'm going to fish for Cummings in my office in a few minutes. We're meeting 'to discuss cooperation between his committee and the Homicide Squad.' And blah blah blah. In the course of the conversation, I'm casually going to show him a paper on my desk and tell him it contains a list of the names and addresses of our own undercover agents who are trying to get a line on Fascist agitators. This is what is known as feeding the fish the bait. If I know my Robert Matthew, he'll be interested. At that moment, a buzz on the dictaphone will inform me that I'm wanted in the outer office on a matter of importance that may take some time. 'Pardon me, Mr. Cummings', I will say walking out with a careless air and leaving the list of names on the desk. This is what is known as giving him time to nibble."

Paul smiled. "I'll wager you behave so awfully casual he smells it right off."

"You think so? As it happens, I used to do plenty of acting when I was in high school. I played Romeo once. If you don't mind, I'll continue. When I leave Cummings alone in my office with that list of undercover police, I'll be watching to see what he does. Chances are he'll take out a pencil and paper and make a copy of the list then and there. Which is what is known as swallowing the bait, hook, line, and sinker. Because then I land him. All I have to do is yank the string and pull him in. And we'll have his own copy of the list as evidence against him."

"You're not timid about allowing important information to get into his hands? If he should elude your hook—"

Fledge laughed loudly. "Timid! Elude our hook! That's excellent, Paul! Excellent! The list is a phoney, don't you see? The names are completely fictitious. We copied them out of an old novel in the police library. I tell you, this plan is foolproof."

Paul Dawn shrugged and leaned back in his chair. "It's in your hands, Fledge. I remain blissfully uncon-

cerned. Only I hope the hyphenated Mr. Cummings hasn't read the same old novel."

Plainclothesman Cassidy, dressed in a nondescript gray suit, crossed over to the doorway from his position behind a potted plant to join Plainclothesman Berg, dressed in a nondescript brown suit. These two nondescript individuals spoke to each other with their backs turned, out of the sides of their mouths, their eyes full of innocence, studying different sections of the ceiling.

Said Cassidy, "He's just got out of the elevator."

Said Berg, "This is a cinch, but such a cinch."

Said Cassidy, "He's stopped in the middle of the floor. He's took something out of his breast pocket. A yellow sheet of paper. He's studying it."

Said Berg, "It's the list he copied in the Inspector's office. Such a dope. He makes a cop's life easy. What's he doing?"

"He's folded the yellow sheet of paper, putting it back in his breast pocket. The calm, collective type. He lives five blocks away. We follow him, see if he tries to give the yellow sheet to an accomplish. Pick them both up."

"If not?"

"We pick him up alone in front of his house. And we watch careful to see he don't depose of the list along the way."

"A cinch, strictly a cinch."

The two nondescript individuals cut short their pleasant chat and strolled aimlessly in the direction of their own particular potted plants as a distinguished gentleman in his late thirties passed briskly through the doorway of the Homicide Building. As he disappeared the two nondescript individuals gravitated together again, and both became strangely motivated by the idea of catching a bit of fresh air. They too passed through the doorway, barely on the heels of the distinguished gentleman, and as coincidence would have it, seemed to take the same direction.

Said Berg, "He's strolling along like he was walking a dog. It's overconfidence catches them every time."

Said Cassidy, after a couple of minutes, "Two and a half blocks already. He's gotta hurry up if him and his accessory are going to have a candlestick meeting."

"Clandestine meeting, dope."

Cassidy looked hurt. "I was speaking metamorphical English."

"You should keep your eyes on the suspect and leave the English to guys like William J. Shakespeare and Henry W. Longfellow and Edgar Anthony Guest."

"He ain't tried to get rid of the yellow paper yet."

Berg muttered something about "A rat in a trap," and they moved on, this time more rapidly for the distinguished gentleman, having cast a quick glance over his shoulder, had unaccountably quickened his stride.

"Four blocks," said Cassidy in a solemn tone.

"We should get ready, maybe, to pick him up."

"Something'll go wrong, I'm sure of it. My wife told me this morning it was my unlucky day."

"Keep your eyes on the suspect. What's your wife got to do with it?"

"It's her womanly intimidation."

"Wait a second! Look at him!"

"What's wrong?"

"He's not walking along the street no more! He's ducked into an alley between those two five-storey warehouses!"

Cassidy's face turned colors and he began to run. "Come on! He's gone into that alley to get rid of the paper!"

"Take it easy!" said the shorter, pudgier Berg who was puffing at his side. "I know this block very well. Those two five-storey warehouses on both sides of the alley are solid brick without any windows. And the alley is a dead-end! He's surrounded by solid brick walls on three sides — and *us* on the fourth side. There ain't no way he can possibly get rid of that yellow paper!"

They had reached the alley. It was dusk, and they could barely see down the fifty feet of the alley.

"He's there," Berg said.

"I can make out his shape," Cassidy added.

"Okay! Go in there and capture him!"

Cassidy looked at him. "But maybe he's got a gun!"

"So what? You're a cop — so you got a gun, too!"

While they were Gaston-and-Alphonsing, a voice hailed them from the darkness; a shape was moving towards them from the mysterious depths of the alley.

"No need to quarrel over who's going to effect the capture, gentlemen. I'm quite willing to come peaceably. Except for entering an alley at early evening, I've committed no crime."

Berg stared at him and then recovered his official manner. "Robert Matthew Herbert Sinclair-with-a-hyphen-Cummings," he intoned taking the culprit by the arm, "I arrest you for making a duplicate of an important and secret paper and for carrying this duplicate on your person in an effort to hinder the war effort."

Cummings listened, and his eyebrow lifted. "But, gentlemen, there must be some mistake! I'm carrying no copy of anything. I'm not carrying any papers at all."

"That's your story," said Berg. "We saw you examining a yellow sheet of paper in the lobby of the Homicide Building; we saw you put that yellow sheet of paper in your breast pocket; we've been watching you ever since, and we saw that you didn't take that yellow paper out of your breast pocket. So unless you threw it away in that alley, which we intend to find out right away, that yellow paper must still be on you."

Cummings smiled a slow, condescendingsmile. "I appreciate your predicament, gentlemen. You have a job to carry out, as do we all. I will not attempt, therefore, to dissuade you

from searching me to the skin and tearing up that alley all night. But I can assure you, gentlemen, before you start, you will find no sheet of yellow paper anywhere in that alley, anywhere in my clothes, or on my body. You kept your eyes on me every minute of the time; it was impossible for me to dispose of that paper — *but I defy you to find it!*"

It was a dismal group that gathered in Paul Dawn's office the morning after Plainclothesmen Cassidy and Berg had followed Robert Sinclair-Cummings and his yellow paper down an alley and into impossibility. The two plainclothesmen were the gloomiest of all as they stood in a corner, nondescript hats in hand. Fledge was redder than usual.

Berg and Cassidy alternated in telling the story of their misfortunes. It was not, Paul contemplated, an unusual affair. The Homicide Squad suffered, as they often had, from a slight case of too-much-cleverness. If Fledge had been content to arrest Cummings in his own office immediately after the suspect had made a copy of the incriminating list of names — But no! Fledge had to let the rat out of the trap, and right back into the rathole! It was the old story of over-ambition causing all the trouble. Fledge had let Cummings loose in the street; Berg and Cassidy had watched him so carefully he couldn't have got rid of a stray hair until he ducked into that alley. It was now up to him, Paul Dawn, to explain how a man who had been searched, X-rayed, practically torn apart organ by organ, could dispose of a yellow sheet of paper in an alley bounded by three windowless five-storey walls which had been searched, X-rayed, practically torn apart brick by brick.

Cummings had only been in the alley a fraction of a minute. What could the man have done in such a short time? What sort of weird machinery had he set into motion, what sort of button had he pushed, what sort of wheels had he set buzzing to make a sheet of yellow paper vanish from the face of the earth?

"Is Cummings hefty enough to throw a sheet of yellow paper five storeys high?"

Fledge said wryly. "Have you ever tried to throw a sheet of paper five storeys? Don't solve an impossible crime with an impossible explanation."

"Temper, temper. Just trying to eliminate the real impossibilities. What about cracks in the three walls?"

"The walls are smooth. No cracks big enough to hide a sheet of paper. We went over them with a fine-tooth comb."

"What exactly is a fine-tooth comb?" Paul demanded irritably. "Everybody is always examining everything with a fine-tooth comb! No windows in the walls?"

"No windows," Fledge growled. "No secret passageways, no hidden doors, no loose bricks, no sheet of yellow paper, no nothing."

"You searched the sidewalk, I trust."

"We searched everywhere. That

sheet of paper isn't in that alley!"

Paul pursed his lips. "A talk with Robert Matthew Herbert Sinclair-hyphen-Cummings is strongly indicated."

For a man who had spent the night in jail, Sinclair-Cummings seemed remarkably self-possessed. He sat in his cell talking to his lawyer, a nervous little gentleman named Shreeve, who kept bouncing up and down and squeaking, "You can't put anything over on Morton K. Shreeve! No, ma'am, you can't —" When Paul and the Inspector arrived, Cummings turned to greet them with the suavity and self-confidence of a host entertaining in his own home.

It was his secret weapon, Paul decided, this complete self-possession. Cummings had disciplined himself to be cool and calm at all times, to display nothing on the surface of the turmoil that might be raging underneath. It was a question whether he was cool enough to try calmly to disprove the existence of a sheet of paper which the entire Homicide Squad proved to exist. Paul rather thought that this man would carry it off.

"You can't put anything over on Morton K. Shreeve," the lawyer was saying. "And I'd like to state that this is an outrage —"

Cummings cut him off. "The Inspector isn't interested in outrages, Morton. He's in a hole, and he's wondering how he's going to crawl out of it. Sit down, gentlemen. Is this where I get the third degree?"

"If they lay one single finger on you —!" Shreeve began.

Fledge turned down the corners of his mouth. "Mighty sure of yourself, aren't you, Cummings?"

"Mighty sure of myself, Inspector," Cummings replied evenly. "Don't you wish you could say the same?"

"I do say the same. We've got an expert working on your case. This is Paul Dawn, head of our Department of Impossible Crimes."

"Mr. Dawn. How fortunate to meet you. But I fail to understand why the Homicide Squad employs your talents for this case, Mr. Dawn. No impossible crime has been committed. Only a very possible one — and the Homicide Squad itself has been the committer. Committer. Is that the correct term?"

"Until a better one comes along."

"Thank you. Matters of grammar and vocabulary trouble me."

"You're easily troubled, Mr. Cummings."

"Sinclair-Cummings. With a hyphen. Not easily, Mr. Dawn. Only for a good reason. I am worried at this moment, for example, about my little daughter."

"Fledge didn't mention you had a child."

"Oh, yes. A darling creature. Perhaps I can find a few photographs. Golden curls, blue eyes, a beautiful infant of five years. Is she fretting for me, Mr. Dawn? It's always been my custom to bring her a small present — a doll, a lollypop, a rubber ball, some small trifle — upon returning home

each night. Last night, I stopped in at the toy shop as usual and purchased a little something on my way to the Inspector's office. Unfortunately, I never returned home. I was — er — detained."

"Seized!" the excited Shreeve squeaked violently. "Without the slightest legal —"

Cummings turned to him coldly. "My dear Morton," he said with the air of a censuring parent. "I was saying, Mr. Dawn. I did not return home last night. Little Doris did not receive her usual present. Is she fretting? Morose? Her little eyes stained with tears? It troubles me deeply."

"You take it too seriously."

"You may be right. Still allow me to indulge this one little worry. After all, Mr. Dawn —" he looked up into the detective's eyes. "— I'm sure you will agree that this is the only worry I have in the world!"

"Where to now, Paul?"

"A quick look at the alley in which the alleged disappearance took place."

"It's only a few blocks from here. We'll walk it."

The two men started off in the direction of the scene of the crime.

"Still think Cummings is as innocent as a lamb, Paul?" asked Fledge.

"Or clever as a fox."

"He's clever, all right," said Fledge gloomily. "Pleasant chat the two of you were having. Crime and domesticity. All very sweet and homey. Sometimes I can't make you out at all."

"Character, my dear Inspector. You ask me to discover the character of the crime. Then permit me to look into the character of the criminal."

"I hope you spent an informative half hour looking into Robert Matthew Herbert's character. I don't see what you accomplished."

Paul was amused. "You would have preferred something gruelling, under a white light, with questions pounding from all sides."

Fledge grumbled, "It might have produced some results."

"When will you learn that you can't always produce results if you push a suspect into a corner? Your friends Cassidy and Berg pushed Cummings into a five-storey corner—a *cul de sac* — and all they received for their trouble were bruised reputations."

Fledge was about to answer when they came to a halt in front of a narrow alley. "*The* alley?" Paul asked, and Fledge nodded.

As he walked down the alley, bathed in shadows even in the middle of the day, he reflected on the disturbing finality of the two five-storey buildings that loomed up on either side of him. He had marched fifty feet or so when he nearly bumped up against a solid, impenetrable connection between the two warehouses, which rose as high as the buildings themselves. A thin, rather anemic shaft of sunlight, which had somehow managed to squeeze its way into the alley, played along the sidewalk. Paul gazed at it thoughtfully.

He was trying to put himself in

Cummings's place. Here he was, standing at the end of the alley, an incriminating sheet of yellow paper in his pocket; two detectives were ready to burst in at any moment and find that paper on his person. He had to get rid of it somehow! Could he hide it? No, the walls were solid, the pavement was solid. Could he tear it into pieces? The detectives would find the pieces. Could he burn it? The detectives would see the flame, find the ashes. Swallow it? The detectives would X-ray his stomach. That sheet of yellow paper was trapped within the confines of these three five-storey, impenetrable walls just as surely as he himself was — and the detectives were coming closer! What could he do?

At this point, Robert Sinclair-Cummings evidently had arrived at a solution. And a sudden idea came to Paul Dawn. He walked briskly out of the alley and joined the Inspector.

"Fledge, I must have the answer to one question. It's vitally important."

"Go ahead."

"You yourself searched Cummings thoroughly right after the paper disappeared?"

"I turned him inside out."

"I want you to tell me *everything* you found in his pockets."

"There wasn't much. Some small change. A wallet full of big bills, business cards, driver's license, so on. A handkerchief. A key ring, full. And a pencil with nothing in it but lead."

Paul's eyes gleamed. "You're absolutely certain that was *all* you found in Cummings's pockets?"

"Positive. What's the matter, Paul?"

"You didn't find *anything else?*"

"Not a piece of lint. What've you got?"

"The answer, Inspector. I know how that incriminating sheet of yellow paper disappeared into thin air!"

"But *how* did he do it, Paul?" demanded Fledge. "I searched that alley and I searched Cummings personally. I can swear that yellow paper wasn't hidden anywhere."

"And you're correct. The paper was removed from the alley." Paul Dawn sighed expansively, and took a long puff on his cigarette. "One discrepancy," he said. "One discrepancy in Cummings's story told me what he had done and how he did it. Of course, it's a minor matter, and you may not see it at first. I'll explain. Cummings told us, you remember, that he invariably bought a small present for his daughter before going home each night."

"I thought he was just making conversation."

"Highly significant conversation. He also said that he had purchased a 'little something' for his daughter at the toy shop before coming to your office on the evening of the disappearance. The toy that he bought for his daughter was, therefore, *in his possession* when he entered your office. It was in his possession during his conference with you. It was in his possession when he left your office, with the sheet of yellow paper in his pocket. It was in his possession as he strolled along the street, with Cassidy and Berg

following. It was in his possession when he ducked into the alley to elude the detectives. But it was *not* in his possession when he was arrested. You gave me an inventory of everything you found in his pockets. *There was no trace of any sort of child's toy!*"

The Inspector looked at him with a combination of wonder and disgust. "But, Paul, that doesn't clear anything up — it makes things worse. Now we've got *two* disappearances instead of *one*. The yellow paper disappears; then some sort of fool toy follows suit. It's a double mystery!"

"On the contrary, Inspector, the two mysteries cancel each other out. I asked myself the question: Why should Cummings have disposed of his daughter's toy, whatever it was? Very peculiar. He was forced to get rid of the paper because it would have incriminated him as a traitor to his country. But why go through the same hocus-pocus for a child's toy? I repeat, why did the toy disappear along with the yellow paper? And the obvious answer occurred. The toy, Inspector Fledge, was the *means* by which the yellow paper was disposed of! *The toy was somehow used to make the paper disappear.*"

Fledge snorted. "It's crazy! Screwy! What sort of a toy could be used to get rid of a sheet of paper in a narrow alley surrounded by five-storeys of solid brick wall?"

"If you'll think about it, Fledge, you'll see that the nature of the alley is a dead giveaway to the nature of the toy. There was only one opening in that alley by which the paper might have left. To the right? A solid wall. To the left? A solid wall. Behind? A solid wall. In front? Two policemen. Below? A solid sidewalk. Above? Above, my dear Fledge, only God's good free air and sunshine. If that paper left the alley, it must have traveled *up*. Cummings couldn't have thrown it into the air, but *the paper could have thrown itself into the air.*

"Listen carefully. There is a certain kind of child's toy to which Cummings could have attached the yellow sheet of paper by string, and which, when released, would have lifted the paper high into the air!"

"*A balloon!*" Fledge cried.

"A balloon," Paul repeated with a deep sigh. "Cummings purchased a toy balloon for his daughter on the afternoon of the crime. That toy balloon was in his pocket when he ducked into the alley that evening. In that alley he was faced with the problem of causing a yellow sheet of paper to vanish. The balloon was his inspiration! He simply inflated the toy balloon, tied a string to one end of it, tied the other end of the string to the yellow sheet of paper, and — let go! Atmospheric pressure did the rest. The balloon obeyed its natural instincts. Up into the air went balloon, string, *and* yellow sheet of paper, wafted into space and doubtless finding a final resting place many hours later and many blocks away.

"The evidence against Robert Sinclair-Cummings actually and literally *disappeared into thin air!*"

No. 5, HQ, C.I.D. Decoded, this means: the latest Hatch Quiz*—Challenging you to Identify a Detective.*

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

HERE is a man with slender drooping figure, a pale ingenuous face, and sleek yellow hair. His lank form is fastidiously clothed and he wears enormous horn-rimmed spectacles. His pale blue eyes look guileless and the habitual expression on his face is one of vaguely contented idiocy. He speaks in a well-bred, precise, but slightly high-pitched voice and chatters happily but inanely on inconsequential matters.

This is a definite picture of a man, yet it is one of vagueness, too, for there are no outstanding characteristics that seize upon the imagination. Unless, of course, we consider that an expression of idiocy is a rather startling attribute for a detective!

On the surface he is very much an ordinary sort of fellow with the normal likes and dislikes of his kind. But the vacuity of his expression and his aimless chatter cloak a keenness of perception and a depth of emotional understanding that all too often give him moments of great unhappiness. His judgment is frequently crippled by the fetters of his own personality — fetters created by the conflict between his hatred of crime and his loyalty to friends who may be suspect. That he somehow carries through, however, is the basic quality of his character. Essentially he is a very extraordinary person despite the extremely ordinary characteristics with which he is clothed.

We have his progenitor's word and a round dozen volumes of his exploits to prove that he is indeed one of the most celebrated amateur criminologists of modern fiction. His closest friend is one of the biggies of Scotland Yard and, needless to say, the latter has benefited handsomely from the association.

He himself denies any allegations of being an intellectual sleuth, claiming that his mind cannot absorb facts with the facility of an adding machine. Rather he likens himself to "the bloke with the sack and the spiked stick," collecting odds and ends as he goes along and "turning out the bag at the lunch hour." This, in effect, is a modest admission that he is in the detective business, although, when pressed for details, he likes to think of himself as a sort of universal uncle, one who is ready to take on other people's adventures on either a fee or friendship basis.

His school days, when a little boy, were spent at Bodolph's Abbey and as a young man he went to Cambridge. The interim that followed and that preceded his appearance as a successful sleuth is part of the shadowy background that is nonetheless an essen-

tial part of him. Of a distinguished family, but disassociated from it, claiming to have been "practically chucked out" because of his detectival proclivities, he lives a life apart under an assumed name and in obscure quarters.

These quarters are to be found in a little cul-de-sac off Piccadilly at 17a Bottle St., W. 1. They consist of a small suite of rooms on the third floor above a police station (identified by a blue lamp) and not too easily reached by climbing two flights of uncarpeted stairway. A heavy oak door, bearing a very fine Florentine knocker and a brass plate inscribed "Mr. ———, The Goods Dept.," opens on a narrow hall which leads to a small but comfortable and curiously furnished living room. Of all the odd appointments the *chef d'oeuvre* consists of a knuckle duster and a large key of singular pattern surmounted by an affectionately autographed Rogues' Gallery portrait of a well-known character which graces the center of the mantel.

The custodian of these quarters is our detective's "gentleman's gentleman" — a large lugubrious person whose pale waste of face is relieved by an immense pair of black mustaches. He is an ex-burglar, has been in his present service going on twenty years, and is given to addressing his employer as "Hi, cock" and referring to him as "a bloke."

Is your guessing apparatus in good order? Have you solved this man's identity by now? If not, there is but little more to be offered that will be of help. He has been in and out of love many times, is now in his early forties and, as his man says, is still sticking his nose into every bit of blood there is about and "getting talked of." In his earlier days he drove a Bentley but now is partial to a Lagonda. He is a handy man to have about when there is a spot of trouble, for despite his innocuous appearance he can give a good account of himself in a rough-and-tumble and is quite as ready as the other fellow to forswear the rules of Queensberry. Now and again he dabbles with conjuring tricks.

And that's the lot! Can **you GUESS** WHO?

(*Solution on page 91*)

Here is the third in Miss de la Torre's remarkable series of 18th Century detective stories. Again the character of Dr. Sam: Johnson, as delineated (supposedly) by James "Bozzy" Boswell, is projected with authentic clarity and persuasive distinction. Your Editor knows of no other historical detective stories that hold a candle to Miss de la Torre's — in scholarship, in humor, in spirit, flavor or compelling detail.

"Monboddo's Ape Boy" is founded on the true character of James Burnet, Lord of Session under the title of Lord Monboddo. Miss de la Torre writes the following about this amazing Scottish philosopher: "There was a man ahead of his times! He anticipated not only the theory of evolution but also modern linguistic science, holding that all European languages had developed by degeneration from a single Mediterranean language which he dubbed the 'Pelasgian' . . . Monboddo reported that in France he once saw an orang-outang which possessed all the intelligence of a man, and 'quite like a rational being had died of drink!' On one occasion Lord Kames said to Monboddo: 'After you, my lord — just to see your tail!' But Monboddo had no tail; he thought he would have had one, but it was worn off with long sitting on it!"

A rare combination, Monboddo and the Sage of Fleet Street, and as Boswell records their encounter, a rare and succulent story. . . .

DR. SAM: JOHNSON AND MONBODDO'S APE BOY

(as recorded by James Boswell, August, 1773)

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

"SIR," said Dr. Johnson, "he who affects singularity, must not complain if he becomes the object of publick curiosity."

I laughed, but made no comment.

"If Lord Monboddo," continued my learned friend severely, "avers that the ourang-outang is the cousin-german of man, he must expect the mob to believe that he peoples his estate with apes. If he speculates upon chymistry, he must put up with a rumour that he has found the philosopher's stone and changes base metal to gold."

My illustrious friend's strictures upon this original Scottish philosopher boded ill for the events of the next twenty-four hours, for as he spoke every revolution of our chaise wheels was carrying us nearer to Monboddo. Journeying northward from Edinburgh in late August of the year 1773, bound for the Highlands of Scotland, I was unwilling that Dr. Johnson should pass by Monboddo when by a short drive we might see the estate and its ingenious owner, James Burnet, a Lord Session under the title of Lord Monboddo. It was so concerted between us, for although Dr. Johnson deprecated the infidelity of Monboddo's speculations on the nature

of man, there were several points of similarity between them: learning, clearness of head, precision of speech, and a love of research on many subjects which people in general do not investigate.

Our road led through rolling moors devoid of any tree. The ragged gray clouds hung low. Nevertheless we drove along at a good pace, preceded by our out-rider and only attendant, my servant Joseph Ritter, a Bohemian, a fine stately fellow above six feet high, mounted on a sturdy gray; whom we presently dispatched before to apprise Lord Monboddo of our coming.

Though the day was lowering and the landscape barren, the rapid motion of the chaise imparted to Dr. Johnson that peculiar pleasure which he took in the mere state of rapid motion; and he answered with indulgence and good-humour when I ventured to dispute his proposition.

"Nay, sir," said I, "how can the foolish inventions of rumour discommode so learned a philosopher as Monboddo?"

"You are wrong," returned my learned friend, "to think that the ill-conceived opinions of men may do no harm to him upon whom they are laid. You see here these two men who carry a bucking-basket between them—"

I observed the pair with interest as the chaise came up to them. They were an ill-assorted pair, plodding along ahead of us supporting between them by means of poles a very Falstaff of a pannier. The man behind was a red-faced, pig-eyed, burly clod dressed like a countryman in dirty leather breeches and a short-skirted frieze coat. The man in the lead was a very different sort. His light eyes were half-closed in a pasty, bony, coffin-shaped face, set off by a large cocked hat and a dirty trickle of torn lace at throat and wrist. They never raised their heads as the chaise passed them in a rolling cloud of white dust.

"I see them," I replied, still staring over my shoulder. "What then?"

"Why, sir," said Dr. Johnson, "let us say that I conceive the unfounded notion that these ruffians have abducted the heiress of Lothian, and are bearing her bound hand and foot in yonder pannier to Aberdeen, where in a mock marriage the thick lout will wed her to the thin one."

"Then," cried I, laughing heartily, "I should much commend your invention, and set you on to commence playwright; but the honest lads would plod on with their burden no whit discommoded by our fantastick notions."

"This is true," replied Dr. Johnson, "only so long as I hold my tongue. But when once I set the story going, 'twill not be long before your honest lads are laid by the heels and brought before the Aberdeen magistrate to answer the question, 'Where is the heiress of Lothian?' — which being unable to answer, they'll be much discommoded before word can be brought that the lady is living peacefully at home."

"And when their pannier is turned out," I added, still laughing, "'tis ten to one 'twill be found to contain Lord Elibank's plate that they've stolen from Edinburgh, for if ever I saw a hanging countenance 'tis yon white face with the dirt-coloured ruffles. So I conceive that by your foolish tale they might be discommoded by the hangman in the end."

"*Quod erat demonstrandum*," said my learned friend in high good humour.

"Why that yonder pair of gallows-birds won't bear investigation is clear," I protested in serious vein, "but sure one of the Lords of Session stands too high to be harmed by the fantastick gabble of the vulgar. No sensible man believes that Lord Monboddo has in train to wed his daughter to the Lithuanian Wild Boy."

"Nor," added Dr. Johnson, "that he sits at Monboddo making gold as a cook makes pyes, and piling the ingots in the cow-shed. But that it is so believed in the streets of Edinburgh is a sharp-edged fact upon which Lord Monboddo may one day cut himself."

"Surely," said I "Lord Monboddo is not to be blamed for what the unlettered may believe."

"Not so," returned Dr. Johnson, "for he makes people stare when the Court of Session rises and he walks home in the rain, followed by his wig riding in state in a sedan-chair; and the truth of this eccentrick behaviour lends colour to every fantastick tale about him. He who eats and drinks and bathes with singularity, may be believed to be singular in the chymistry and natural philosophy of his life as well."

Chatting thus, we reached the gates of our philosophical friend's domain in good time. It had begun to rain, and the treeless moorland looked dreary. We were met by a spry little man in a rustic suit and a round hat. This was our host himself who with old-fashioned courtesy had come down to his gate to greet us.

We saw a thin man of low stature, with a sharp nut-cracker face of sardonic cast. The lift of his short upper lip gave him a countenance forever upon the verge of risibility; but his sharp lower jaw, with strongly hooked nose bent down to meet it, and his sharp little eyes under grizzled tufts of brow, depicted the shrewd observer upon the multifarious activities of mankind. He was then in his fifty-ninth year, in full vigour of mind and body.

I could not forbear contrasting the little philosopher with my companion, the learned lexicographer, as they greeted one another complaisantly. Dr. Johnson was the Scotchman's elder by some five years; in figure he towered over him, being tall and strongly made. His thick figure was attired in a decent brown stuff suit of urban cut, with black worsted stockings and buckled shoes; on his bushy grizzled wig he had firmly planted a plain cocked hat. His heavy face was marred by the scars of scrofula; but there was benevolence in his

glance, and an expression of philosophical common sense about his broad firm chin. He spoke in a loud voice with slow deliberate utterance.

"Sir," said he courteously to Monboddo, "you are most obliging. Pray, sir, will you not step into the chaise and ride with us to your door? You must be wetted to the marrow."

"No sir," replied Lord Monboddo uncompromisingly, "I willnotstepinto your chaise. I do not ride in chaises. I hold that man was born to ride on a horse's back, not to be dragged at his tail in a box."

I looked for a stern rebuke at this new instance of our host's affectation of singularity, but Dr. Johnson was complaisant.

"Then, sir," he replied instantly, "we will descend and walk with you."

Lord Monboddo was delighted.

"'Tis but a step," he said eagerly, "and on the way I will show you my new plantations of turnips, which I have but newly introduced into Scotland."

The turnip plantings were devoid of interest, being bare and streaming with rain; but it was indeed not far from the gate to the house. Monboddo is a wretched place, wild and naked, with a poor old house; though there are two turrets which mark an old baron's residence. Lord Monboddo pointed to the Douglas arms upon his house, saying that his great-grandmother was of that family.

"In such houses," said he in his reedy tenor, "our ancestors lived, who were better men than we."

This was too much for Dr. Johnson.

"No, no, my lord," he cried loudly, "we are as strong as they, and a great deal wiser."

We passed through the low doorway into a lofty, draughty old hall; but Lord Monboddo led us directly to the great kitchen, where a deep fire burned on the open hearth. There we dried our steaming clothes, and debate on the primitive state of mankind was deferred.

That done, Lord Monboddo set us down to a rustic feast of mutton and boiled turnips, quoting from Horace:

"Lucullus, whom frugality could charm,
Ate roasted turnips at the Sabine farm."

In true Attic style the table was strewn with late roses, and roses garlanded the flagons filled with *mulsum*, a kind of sweetened wine. Assisting us to more turnips, the ingenious philosopher set forth his theory of alimentation.

"I hold," he declared, "that man is benefitted by a nice balance of animal and vegetable nourishment. Another turnip, Mr. Boswell? We are told, that man in a state of nature subsists upon vegetable substances such as roots and berries; and 'tis very clear that man in a state of nature is man at his happiest. Another turnip, Dr. Johnson?"

"No, sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "I will *not* have another turnip. I will have another cut off the joint. Man in a state of nature is not so

happy nor so wise as I am; and to my happy and wise state I hold roast meat to be a great contributor."

"Why, sir," protested Monboddo, "'Tis allowed, that Peter the Wild Boy was never so happy and healthy as when subsisting on the fruits of the earth, gathered by his own uninstructed endeavours, in the forests of Hannover. So also said Memmie Le Blanc, the Wild Girl, whom I saw in Paris through the good offices of M. Condamine, 'tis now eight years gone."

"Then," replied Dr. Johnson, "the girl Le Blanc perceived what you would be at, and framed her answers accordingly. I'll offer the girl Le Blanc a good cut off the joint, and you'll offer her a turnip or a dish of berries, and we shall soon see which she will take."

"Would it were possible," said Monboddo wistfully, "I offered what I could to bring Memmie Le Blanc into England, but 'twould not do. I would have brought her up at Monboddo, and taught her to speak."

"Had she a tail?" I enquired, knowing Monboddo's weakness.

"I will not say," replied Monboddo, "that she had not the vestige of a bump upon her rump; but indeed, though primitive man had a tail, we have lost it by the attrition of long sitting on it."

Dr. Johnson jerked his head restlessly, and swallowed a mouthful of mutton. I was glad when the entrance of a serving-man created a diversion.

"'Tis a pair of bumpkins, my lord," said he, "has brought a specimen to show your lordship."

"Admit them," said Monboddo instantly. The servant stood aside, and into the room stepped the lout in the leather breeches and his companion in the cocked hat, which he did not remove. They set their pannier down in front of the little philosopher.

"What have you brought me?" demanded Monboddo eagerly.

"'Tis an ape, like," mumbled he of the leather breeches.

"My man," said Dr. John, "the ape is not indigenous to Scotland."

"'Tis not exactly an ape neither," said the bumpkin, "though we caught it in a tree. You may say 'tis an ape boy."

"An ape boy!" cried Monboddo, "Let me see it at once!"

The lout made as if to unfasten the pannier, but the white-faced man laid a finger on his arm.

"Now, sir," said the bumpkin hastily, "'Twas mortal hard to catch, and we ha' carried it for miles. Sure you'll not be stingy with us. What's a guinea to you, my lord? Ay, or five, or ten?"

"So," said the Lord of Session, "well, I'll buy it of you, my lads, if a guinea apiece will do it."

The weatherbeaten face fell.

"Make it two apiece, my lord," he whined.

"I'll not buy an ape boy in a poke," said Monboddo sharply. "Turn it out; if 'tis to my liking, I'll bargain with you."

The ruddy man shook his head,

muttering "Two guineas apiece"; but again the coffin-faced manlaid a finger on his arm. He overset the basket and unfastened the catch. Out crawled on hands and feet, dirty and touselled and emaciated, naked as the day he was born, an undeniable wild boy.

Lord Monboddo was delighted. Without ceremony he laid hands upon the frightened creature, and proceeded to investigate his small posterior for a tail. There was none.

"Sure, sir," remarked Dr. Johnson, "you are a logician indeed, for I see you reason by the method."

"How so?" I enquired.

"The learned advocate," replied Johnson, "is seen to reason *a posteriori*."

The bony-faced man greeted this sally with a suppressed snort, but his weatherbeaten companion ignored all save the matter in hand.

"Will he do, my lord?" he enquired impatiently.

"You must say how you came by him," replied the little philosopher.

The wild boy squatted on his hams and watched with bright eyes from beneath his tangled mat of hair. He was small and wiry, perhaps as much as ten years old. There were fresh scratches on his skinny arms, and a bruise on his dark cheek. He watched Lord Monboddo without blinking.

"Caught him in a tree," replied the man, adding as an afterthought, "eating nuts."

"Where?"

"This side of Montrose."

"Can he speak?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"Never a word. He's a real wild ape boy, my lord, and they said at Lawrencekirk you'd pay us well for him."

"A guinea apiece," said Monboddo firmly.

The lout began to whine, but he took the guinea the Scotchman handed him and backed off. The whey-faced man pocketed a guinea in his turn, and between them they maneuvered the pannier out at the door and were gone.

"What a fortunate thing!" exclaimed Lord Monboddo. "I will communicate with M. Condamine at once. I will write a report for the Select Club. A real wild boy! — Here, sir, what are you about?"

With his own hands my revered friend was shovelling turnips onto a plate.

"Why, my lord," replied Dr. Johnson coolly, dexterously slicing a large cut off the joint and laying it on a second plate, "why my lord, 'tis not every night a man has it in his power to test Lord Monboddo's theories by actual experimentation. Here, boy."

He laid both plates on the floor where the wild boy still squatted warily. Unhesitatingly the scrawny half-starved creature chose the mutton. He did not grovel into it with his snout like a pig, but took it up in both hands like a squirrel with a nut, tearing at it ravenously. When it was gone, he curled himself up into a ball under the table, and instantly fell into slumber; nor could Lord Monboddo's impatience awaken him again.

"Let the lad sleep," said Dr. Johnson, "We shall get nothing further from him till he is rested. Pray, my lord, will you not let us enjoy the sight of your chymical experimentations?"

"Gladly," replied Lord Monboddo, "Pray step this way."

He led the way down a passage toward one of the ancient turrets, and unlocked a massive door with a large brass key which he took from his pocket. We entered a lofty vaulted room furnished with every device for chymical experimentation. A kiln stood on one side, supported by a very St. Dunstan's battery of pokers, tongs, shovels, and besoms. Vessels of clay in tortured shapes were crowded on the walls. Over a brick oven a closed copper bubbled monotonously through a long spiral of glass.

Lord Monboddo took from his pocket a second brass key, and unlocked the heavy chest which stood by the door.

"I hold, sir," said he, "that every metal is composed of infinitesimal particles, smaller than any yet rendered out; I do not despair of so reducing them; and when I have done so, what shall hinder me to build these atomies again into new combinations? I may thus produce one metal from another; or I may produce by reduction and combination metals wholly new, stronger and more useful than any yet known."

"Why, sir," said I, "then you may turn lead into gold if you will."

"You will have the philosopher's stone," concurred Dr. Johnson.

"'Tis my view," said the eccentrick Lord of Session, "that only that has value which is useful. I would rather turn gold into iron. I have gold."

He laid in my hand a yellow ingot of about the bigness of my little finger.

"This is gold," said he, "I will reduce it, and turn it to iron or tin, if I can."

I surveyed the rows of ingots in the brass-bound chest.

"Is it all gold?" I gasped.

"Not so," replied Lord Monboddo, "for I will as gladly turn iron into tin, or tin into iron, if it may be so. This is tin."

He handed me a duller, lighter finger of metal.

"This is lead — this is iron — this is silver —"

My learned friend and I observed the metals with interest.

"How will you go about to reduce — I should say to transmute — these metals?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"Sir," replied Monboddo, "liquefaction has failed. I design to use pressure, when once I can devise some means of producing a pressure sufficiently great."

"Well, sir," said Dr. Johnson, "lock up your treasure chest, for all men are not such philosophers as we, to despise a bar of gold if it may be easily come by."

Lord Monboddo wielded the ponderous brass key and pocketed it. He then walked to the narrow windows and dropped the bars of the heavy shutters.

"You do well," approved Dr. Johnson, "to make this room impregnable, for gold is a strong temptation."

"Nay, Dr. Johnson," replied Lord Monboddo, "I trust my people. I lock and bar behind me, only because the slightest meddling, though well-intentioned, might bring to naught a chymical investigation on which I had spent weeks of labour."

He locked the oaken door behind us as we left, and the second key joined the first. The wild boy, awakened from his cat-nap, was frisking in the corridor. As we stood by the door in a contest of courtesy as to who should be first down the passage, he loped swiftly toward us, and before we could move he had scaled Monboddo like a tree.

"God bless my soul!" cried the wiry little Scotchman.

For a moment the wild boy clung about our astonished friend's neck, mopping and mowing; then with a leap he ascended into the ornamental cornice over the door and squatted there on hands and haunches.

"Come down!" cried Monboddo in alarm. "Alas, he'll do himself a mischief."

"He who can climb up," said Dr. Johnson calmly, "canclimbdown.Let us leave him here. He is like a puppy; you shall see, he will follow fast enough."

We walked away slowly. I watched out of the tail of my eye. The bright eyes of the wild boy followed us to the turn of the passage. Then with a leap he was down and running after us as fast as his hands and feet would carry him.

"He is indeed like a puppy," mused Monboddo as he sat by the kitchen fire. The wild boy, squatting at his feet, nuzzled the Scotchman's thin hand, and was rewarded by a pat on the head.

"I'll teach him to speak," says Monboddo in a happy waking dream, "I'll teach him to wear clothes and write."

"And to subsist on a vegetable diet?" enquired Dr. Johnson slyly.

"Yes, sir," replied Monboddo innocently. " 'Twill be a great vindication of my theories. He shall be tended and instructed; I'll make him a lawyer. He shall learn to be grateful for the day when I bought him from yonder rough lout."

The wild boy chewed softly on his finger.

"See," saysMonboddo happily, "he caresses me. This is a great argument that gratitude is innate in the human species."

"If that be indeed gratitude," responded Dr. Johnson, " 'Tis a great argument that knowledge of the English language is innate in the human species. How otherwise could he apprehend the benefits you intent him?"

"By instinct," said Monboddo, "the wild thing knows by instinct who is his friend." He softly scratched the wild boy's touselled head.

"It may be," said Dr. Johnson. "None the less, I advise you against putting your finger in his mouth."

"Gentlemen," said I, creating a diversion, "the hour grows late. Let

us retire. Pray, Lord Monboddo, what is to be your ape boy's place of rest? Must we put him in a tree?"

"He shall have a pile of clouts by the fire," responded the benevolent little philosopher. "He shall have better when I have taught him cleanly habits."

The ape boy took kindly to the warm nest by the fire. We left him burrowed into it, and took leave till morning.

Dr. Johnson and I lay in one commodious chamber together. Retiring first, I jotted down, as is my custom, the interesting events of the day, and the wise comments made thereon by my philosophical friend. When I had finished, and still Dr. Johnson lingered, I ventured to take the candle and sally forth in search of him.

I found him, to my unutterable amazement, painfully clambering down from the cornice above the chymistry room door; I gaped at him.

"What do you here, Bozzy?" demanded he in a subdued voice bursting with annoyance.

"Nay, sir, what do *you*?" I demanded in my turn, suiting my tone to his.

He dusted off his decent brown small-clothes, and suddenly he grinned at me.

"I had a fancy to see if the wild boy had left any nuts in this tree."

"And had he?" I asked stupidly.

"Yes, sir," said Dr. Johnson. "Two. Write it in your note-book, Bozzy: where the wild boy can climb, there can climb the old scribbler from London."

"With the aid of a stool," I remarked, indicating the bench my friend had used to make the ascent.

"Take up the stool, then," said Dr. Johnson, "It belongs at the bend of the passage."

We were awakened betimes by blood-curdling screams from without, which continued as we hastened below.

"In Heaven's name," cried Dr. Johnson to a passing domestic, "what is the meaning of this horrible outcry?"

The man laughed.

"'Tis only the wild boy," said he. "You must know, Lord Monboddo thinks to do himself good by going nude in the morning air in his chamber, and mighty pleased he is that his wild boy exposes himself from morning till night without any respect for Christians. Well, sir, when my lord has aired himself thoroughly, he goes next, for his health's sake, to bathe in a stream of living water which he has led through a commodious little bathing-house hard by. Now, sir, as the wild boy is well aired too, Lord Monboddo must needs carry him along to bathe for *his* health's sake; but the little animal, I take it, will have none of it, for he's screaming bloody murder down there. Look, here he comes."

The wild boy came streaking across the door-yard and clambered breathlessly up to the roof of the lean-to, where he clung wild-eyed and panting.

He was as dirty and black as ever; clearly Lord Monboddo's bathing regimen was less than attractive to his primitive mind.

"This is cruelty," cried Dr. Johnson, who never loved cold water. "Come, come down, boy."

The wild boy eyed him with dumb distrust. Dr. Johnson signalled him with his great hand. The wild boy shook his head stubbornly.

"Here, Bozzy, fetch the joint. He'll understand that."

He understood it indeed. He came down at once. It was a sight to see the learned philosopher standing in the misty morning feeding gobbets of mutton to a dirty, hairy, naked wild boy.

His *al fresco* breakfast over, the little animal ran in and quickly fell asleep by the fire, just as Lord Monboddo came trotting back from his bath, looking chopped and red and feeling self-righteous.

Dr. Johnson cut short his disquisition.

"I've lived sixty years without cold water, and I'll not take to it now. Let us hear no more of this."

It came on to rain, and Dr. Johnson declined as firmly to join our host in a circumambulation of his borders. Lord Monboddo made us free of his library, and with profuse apologies left us to inspect the progress of some sort of rain-trenching in his turnip fields.

I settled down by the fire with Dodd's sermons, and I may have nodded a little. As I jerked up my head I saw out of the tail of my eye the bare-footed ape boy flitting like a shadow out at the door. I followed softly. A chronicler must neglect no means of observation that may enrich his record.

The bare feet pattered lightly down the long passage to the chymical room. The door was ajar. He slipped inside, and so did I after him.

Behind me the door swung to with a click, and the key grated in the lock.

"Mr. Boswell," said Dr. Johnson quietly, "This is a lucky chance. I have a mind to try a little transmutation of my own, and you shall be my assistant."

"I know nothing of chymistry," I replied doubtfully, though willing to be of help. I recalled the Doctor's chymical experimentations at Streatham, mostly explosive in nature, and shuddered slightly.

"'Tis not a chymical transmutation," replied my friend, "but a human one. I have a mind to teach Monboddo's wild boy how to speak."

"This is the task of years," I protested, "and Lord Monboddo will scarce thank you if you begin at the wrong end, and set his theories at naught."

"Lord Monboddo will thank me indeed," said Dr. Johnson gently, "if he comes home and finds that I have taught his wild boy to speak between breakfast and dinner."

"How is this to be accomplished?" I enquired.

"Very simply, sir," replied my learned friend, "as you would teach

a jack-daw to speak. We'll takeout the fold of his tongue as a huntsman worms a whelp, and then we'll split the tongue to the root, but carefully, for I would not slit his throat; and you shall see, he will speak to us like any Christian."

I regarded my old friend with horror. He proposed this hideous surgery upon his friend's wild boy in easy and gentle tones, a slight smile of benevolence playing about his lips.

"Come, Bozzy," said he, "don't be squeamish. Our proceedings will be of inestimable benefit to knowledge. 'Twill pain the subject, I grant; but his screams will go unheard behind these thick walls, and Monboddo will thank us in the end."

I found no words to reply.

"You may take the tongs," pursued Dr. Johnson. "I fancy the carving-knife will serve my turn. But first we must secure our subject. Do not move, Bozzy, he must not be alarmed. I'll just approach him gently —"

As he spoke these words in an even, gentle tone, Dr. Johnson was already moving toward the unsuspecting wild boy. But as he came within arm's reach, his victim suddenly gave an uncontrollable scream of terrour, and bolted toward the locked door. He seemed to understand that it was locked, for he wasted no time wrenching at the handle, but scaled the door-frame in an ecstasy of fear, and clung trembling above the lintel. Dr. Johnson smiled grimly.

"Come down," he said, "come down. What's your name, eh? Dick? Tom? Come down, I'll not hurt you."

Still the wild boy clung to the cornice.

"I know you understand me," said Dr. Johnson sternly. "Speak but two words, and I promise I will protect you."

The wild boy gazed down with stiffened lips.

"Come, sirrah," said Dr. Johnson, "What is to be the word? There is a word?"

"Witcher and ridge," whispered the trembling boy.

"And the time?"

"Midnight."

"Tonight?"

The wild boy nodded.

"Come down, then, boy," said Dr. Johnson. "I will be your friend."

The skinny frame slid lightly to the floor. The bright eyes searched my friend's face, and then the child burst into a passion of weeping.

"Here, boy, don't do that," said my benevolent friend anxiously. "Come, I'll get you something to eat." He took the grimy hand in his. "But remember, don't ever eat turnips."

But though this strange exchange cemented a stranger friendship between my friend and the dirty, naked child, so that they spent the rainy day in one another's company; and though the wild boy had indeed spoken two words; nothing of this was said to Lord Monboddo when he came home in the gloaming. The wild boy again sat under the table and ate generously off the joint, without tur-

nips, eating eagerly from his thin fingers. Again we sat by the kitchen fire, and the wild boy sat against Monboddo's knee. Again we retired betimes to our commodious chamber, and the wild boy lay among his clouts by the fire.

'Twas hard on midnight when Dr. Johnson rose and huddled himself into his great-coat. He slipped a pistol into my hand.

"Come," he said, "but lightly, for Monboddo is a poor sleeper."

We passed quietly, without a light, to the door of the chymistry room, which Johnson opened with the key. A shadow came down the passage toward us.

" 'Tis Ritter," Johnson breathed in my ear.

My man-servant took his stand beside me. He was armed with a cudgel. With infinite quiet Dr. Johnson set the door close.

We stood so for interminable minutes, hearing the old house creak and whisper around us, and the fire in the brick oven sigh and crack. Then I heard the click of a drawn bolt, and in a moment I was aware of movement in the passage, guarded and almost soundless. Another second, and the door swung silently inward.

"Stand," cried Dr. Johnson, thrusting his pistol against a dark shape. I found the second man's ribs with the muzzle of mine.

"Bing avast!" cried a thick voice. "The young Abram cove has betwattled us!"

"Stubble your whids," drawled a second voice. "We yield, sir."

"Secure the child," cried Dr. Johnson. "Ritter, strike a light."

It was not clear to me how Ritter was to hold the slippery child and strike a light at the time; but he contrived it, for when the candle's rays strengthened and revealed the strange scene, they fell first on the terrified face of Monboddo's wild boy, held fast by the tangled hair.

They fell, too, on the pale coffin-shaped physiognomy of the man of the pannier, and on his burly companion.

"Ruffin cly thee, Jem," muttered the latter between his teeth, "hast whiddled the whole scrap, eh?"

"Shut your bone-box," said the pale-faced man, "I'll take care of Jem." He smiled dangerously. He spoke negligently well, like a Mohock. The skinny boy shrank back against his captor.

"Make them secure," said Dr. Johnson to Ritter. My servant produced a quantity of rope. He bound the false wild boy with a prodigious number of loops, and laid him on the bench.

The heavy-set man showed fight when his turn came, but Ritter tapped him under the ear, and he gave no more trouble. He too was bound and stowed away. The second man cursed us with quiet dignity. He too was made secure.

"What's to be done with these gentry?" I enquired.

"We'll carry them to Aberdeen in the morning," replied Dr. Johnson.

"And ask them for the heiress of

Lothian?" I suggested.

"Why, you read them aright after all," acknowledged Dr. Johnson. "But we cannot leave them here. I'll carry the fine gentleman with the foul tongue to the lean-to, and do you and Ritter transport his accomplice to the bathing-shed. 'Tis damp, but sturdy, and will keep him close till time to depart."

So it was done. I returned to our chamber bursting with curiosity to question my astute friend about the events of the night. What was my disappointment, then, to find him already asleep in his bed, and beside him, shorn and washed, albeit somewhat sketchily, and attired in a ruffled shirt much too large for him, Monboddo's erstwhile wild boy. I was forced to blow out my candle and retire unsatisfied.

When I awoke the morning sun was streaming through the casement. I looked across at the bed opposite. It was empty. Dr. Johnson had arisen, and to my surprise very betimes, for the sun was only just above the horizon; and he had taken the now civilized wild boy with him.

I made haste to rise in my turn, and followed him down. As I entered the kitchen, what a sight met my eyes! There sat the wild boy at the breakfast table on a sturdy chair, supported for the increase of altitude by a heavy copy of Foxe's *Martyrs*. He was still swathed in the amplitude of my learned friend's ruffled shirt. A session at the pump had left him glistening with cleanliness and washed away the dark stain which his accomplices had applied. His dark hair had been unskillfully shortened, and stood up in wet spikes all over his small head. A plate before him was piled with viands, and he was plying knife and fork, though not elegantly, yet with assurance.

My learned friend sat beside him, eating oat cakes, and drinking tea. Opposite him the little Scotch philosopher was neglecting his chocolate to watch fascinated his small guest's gastronomic feats. Somewhere Dr. Johnson had found the remains of last night's mutton; he was plying his small friend with collops as fast as he could eat them. The *radicivorous* Lord of Session was mute with disapproval.

I took my place and opened my mouth to give expression to the questions which were thronging there; but Dr. Johnson imperiously signed for silence, and bestowed another gobbet on the now civilized wild boy.

At last the boy heaved a sigh of pure repletion, and pushed back Foxe's *Martyrs*. Dr. Johnson set down his fifth cup of tea (for it is slander to allege, as did Mrs. Blacklock in Edinburgh, that the great man was accustomed to consume *twenty-two* cups to his breakfast).

"Now, my dear sir," cried Lord Monboddo, "pray lay aside this air of mystery and reveal to me how you have achieved the civilization of this young savage in the space of twenty-four hours. This is certainly a notable

achievement, and one which I am eager to communicate to my friend M. Condamine."

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson gravely, "you owe it to the address of this young savage, as you call him, that the danger is passed that your hoard of gold may be rifled —"

"Pshaw, a trifle," ejaculated Monboddo.

"And your chymical researches brought to naught."

"How!" cried Monboddo. "Who are these miscreants? They shall be punished!"

"They shall indeed," promised Dr. Johnson. "With the help of Mr. Boswell and the man Ritter we have laid them by the heels, and I propose to transport them to Aberdeen with the luggage in our chaise; for they are clearly London cullies, and none of your home-grown product."

"Sir," cried the little philosopher, "I am indebted to you. Pray disclose how you came to uncover the plot against me."

"My lord," replied my friend, "'twas this worthy boy who disclosed the plot to me; he has served you well, and I recommend him to your protection."

"He shall be protected," promised Lord Monboddo. "I'll educate him myself; I'll make him a lawyer."

The wild boy slipped down from Foxe's *Martyrs*, and leaned shyly against Monboddo's chair. The benevolent little Scotchman patted the thin shoulder.

"There's a good boy," he said, "Pray, Dr. Johnson, does he understand me?"

"Perfectly, my lord; if you do not address him in too philosophical a strain."

"I marvel how you attained such a result, sir."

"You must understand, my lord, that your wild boy is a creature uniquely wild, not at all to be compared to Peter or to Memmie Le Blanc, being wilder than either and yet sharper. By little and little as he gains confidence he will speak to you; but you are by no means to question him about whence he came, but rather erase it from his memory. I adjure you to feed him well, and not confine his diet to the vegetable kind, for you have seen that out of instinct he chose the joint."

"He shall be carnivorous, Dr. Johnson."

"Then, sir," said Dr. Johnson, "as I perceive our chaise is at the door with the luggage on top and the brave Ritter in attendance, we will take our leave."

"Sir," replied Lord Monboddo, "I'm like the Romans, 'happy to come, happy to depart'."

We parted with great kindness. Stowed out of sight, the pale-faced man could be heard cursing steadily in his well-modulated, cultivated voice; but his words were muffled. As we sat in the chaise ready to depart, the former wild boy leaped from Monboddo's side, swarmed up the side of the chaise, and clung about Dr. Johnson's neck, whispering farewells in

his ear.

"Have no fear," said Dr. Johnson to him kindly, "obey good Lord Monboddo in all things, and all will be well."

The boy nodded his touselled head, and ran back to cling to the skirts of the little Scotchman's coat, as the chaise rolled out of the door-yard.

As we rolled swiftly along on the highway to Aberdeen, the cursing of the white-faced man died away to sulky silence; which Dr. Johnson suddenly broke with a great shout of laughter, giving himself up to it, rolling his great frame from side to side as he bellowed out his mirth.

"Ho, ho, Bozzy," cried he, "did you mark the face on the little philosopher when his wild boy chose the good roast mutton? I'll warrant you that will stop his cant about alimentary *balance*. Ho, ho, the brave wild boy!"

"Sir," said I severely, "in my judgement Lord Monboddo has been abused. Trust me, you knew when you tried him with the mutton and turnips that the boy was no wild boy."

Dr. Johnson stopped laughing and looked at me.

"That is so," he said, "but how did you know?"

"'Tis clear," I replied, "that you proposed Torquemada's trick on the wild boy only to learn from his behavior whether he understood what you said or no. He betrayed himself, and subsequently you were able to force from him a confession of his part in the plot."

"Bravo, Bozzy," cried Dr. Johnson. "But, indeed, the lad had no stomach for the scheme, and played his part only out of fear. I had only to promise him protection, and he was quite ready to admit the robbers into the trap in which we took them."

BOSWELL: "How could he admit them into a house so closely locked and barred?"

JOHNSON: "With the keys."

BOSWELL: "Surely he could not hope that Lord Monboddo would let him come at the keys."

JOHNSON: "He had not been an hour in the house when he adroitly slipped them from our friend's pocket before our eyes."

BOSWELL: "Yet though he came by them, how could he keep them? He could hardly conceal them about him."

"Why," said my learned friend, laughing, "you saw him conceal them."

"*I* did?"

"And you saw me recover them; though your haste to think me gone quite mad prevented you from asking what I meant by the nuts in this tree."

"Over the door!" I cried in a burst of enlightenment.

"Just so," replied Dr. Johnson, nodding vigourously. "I recovered them, and frustrated any attempt that night. When the next day I found the lad ready to fall in with my scheme to entrap the miscreants, I restored the front door key long enough for him

to use it."

"What foreign tongue," I enquired curiously, "does the boy speak?"

"That is no foreign tongue," replied my widely-learned friend, "but thieves' cant, very common in London and the country over. Nor does the boy speak any more than he has picked up from his criminal companions in this adventure."

"I marvel where they found a boy so agile and apt for the part," said I.

"Nothing is easier," replied Dr. Johnson, "I will go into Edinburgh and buy you twenty such."

"Twenty wild boys?" I demanded incredulously.

"Twenty *chimney-sweeps*," replied Dr. Johnson.

"What will Monboddo do with a chimney-sweep?" mused I.

"Educate him," replied Dr. Johnson. " 'Tis a sharp lad, and will do well at the law. I would have sent him back to Edinburgh, but the lad had taken a prodigious fancy to Monboddo. 'Twill amuse the little philosopher; and sure an Edinburgh street urchin is wild enough boy for anybody, and will vastly interest M. Condamine."

"I cannot think," I confessed, "how you smoaked the imposture in the first place."

"Why, sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "yonder lout who did the talking had no sooner opened his mouth than he was out with a whopping great lie. We caught him, says he, in a tree eating nuts — nuts in August! And as to catching him in a tree, pray whoever heard tell of a tree in Scotland?"

"The Murder of Lady Twickinham" is an excerpt from the guest appearance of Ed Gardner on the Chase & Sanborn radio show starring Gracie Fields, as broadcast by NBC on Sunday, June 18, 1944.

Ed Gardner is the most famous Mr. Malaprop of radio — Archie, the "gay illiterate" of Duffy's Tavern which is currently to be heard over the NBC network every Friday. (See your local paper for time and station.)

In this mirthful murder-miniature Archie tells Gracie a story of hilarious homicide. A double murder is involved— the murder of Lady Twickinham and the murder of the King's English. But "Perish forbid" that we reveal another word! Leave us not be prematernal. Leave us not keep Archie from telling the story in his own words!

THE MURDER OF LADY TWICKINHAM

by ED GARDNER

(Archie of Duffy's Tavern)

GRACIE: Archie, is Duffy's Tavern staying open this summer?

ARCHIE: No, Duffy and his wife decided to close the place for the summer for altercations.

GRACIE: Archie, you mean alterations — an altercation is a fight.

ARCHIE: You don't know Mr. and Mrs. Duffy. They're leaving soon on their second honeymoon.

GRACIE: Really?

ARCHIE: Yeh. Duffy didn't like the first one. He wants a return match. Howsomever . . . (telephone rings)

ARCHIE: That may be for me. Hello, Duffy . . . I'm here trying to wrangle a job for the summer. . . . With Fields. . . . No, Duffy, not *that* Fields. This one is standing *up*. Mmmm. The one with the *white* nose. Gracie Fields. She's a raconteur . . . I can say that on the air, there's nothin' dirty. . . . A raconteur is a singer. . . . Yeah, like Bing Crosby . . . Huh? Who knows how many children she's got? Yeah — well anyway, I'm trying to get a job writing her radio program. . . . Yeah, with me writing her stuff she'll be a big name. What? Duffy, not that kind of a name! I'll call you back. (*Hangs up*)

GRACIE: Archie, what's wrong with my radio program as it is now?

ARCHIE: Frankly, it's terrible!

GRACIE: Now just a second!

ARCHIE: It is! Otherwise what would a bum like me be doing on it?

GRACIE: I suppose you have a remedy?

ARCHIE: Yep, and you don't have to spell it backwards either. Miss Fields — to put it blunt, I have a radio serial here which I have

wrote for you.

GRACIE: Which you have *wrote?*

ARCHIE: Forgive the subjunctive tense. Anyhow, I figure with you as a great entertainer and me as a great writer we could be of great mutual detriment to each other.

GRACIE: You mean that in no time we could both be independently destitute.

ARCHIE: Correct. We'll be on Greasy Street . . . and believe me, Gracie, if mine ain't the greatest radio serial ever written I'm a monkey's uncle.

GRACIE: Let's keep your family out of this. What's this radio serial about?

ARCHIE: Well, it takes place in me home town — England.

GRACIE: Are *you* English?

ARCHIE: Ain't it obvious? Of course. I was born in Great British. Ah! How I love that good old Piccalilly!

GRACIE: You relish it, huh? What's the name of this radio serial?

ARCHIE: I call it — "My Gal Sal . . . Tally-Ho".

GRACIE: What do I play — Tally or Ho?

ARCHIE: Leave us not be facetious. You play Lady Twickinham —the wife of the famous lawyer and bannister — Sir John Twickinham. You and Sir John has been married for twenty years and youse get along great — riding on the hounds together — shooting greese in Scotland — going out on the moors banging away at peasants. But suddenly you begin to notice certain suspicious things about Sir John. Powder on his lapels . . . blonde hairs on his waistket . . . lipstick on his ascap tie. . . . So you naturally say to yourself — "Can John be getting tired of my Hot Fudge?" Then one night he comes home drunk and beats you over the head with a cricket wicket.

GRACIE: A cricket wicket?

ARCHIE: Yeah — a Louisville Slugger with a monocle. Anyways, he emaciates you over the head — he throws you down the stairs — he pours hot water over you. So a few days of that and your feelings start to get hurt.

GRACIE: I'm sensitive, huh?

ARCHIE: Yeah, and before long Sir John is running around with every tomato he sees. So you decide you'll go out with other men. So you go see this plastered surgeon. The surgeon gives you a whole new face and you're beautiful . . . like a caterpillar coming out of a raccoon. Then one day you're walking down Piccalilly, with this new kisser, and low and get hold, your own husband whistles at you. Well, you ain't changed too much, so you whistle back — and it's bigamy at first sight.

GRACIE: You mean I marry him again?

ARCHIE: Yep — it becomes an internal rectangle. You are now not only Sir John's first wife but you are John's Other Wife, too. Then suddenly one day he looks into your mouth to see how old you

are and he recognizes the same gold teeth, so he realizes he's been dooped — so that night after dinner he slips you a maggum of cyanide.

GRACIE: A maggum?

ARCHIE: Yeh — a quart bottle. He knows you're a heavy drinker. Well, anyways, you drink the quart of cyanide and you die — fatally. So two days later Sir John is caught at the drugstore when he tries to get the deposit back on the bottle. How do you like it, Gracie? Do you think you'll hire me?

GRACIE: I might. . . . Would you be willing to clean out a sink?

ARCHIE: Clean out a sink? I might — if it ain't menial work. Well, anyway, in the last scene we find Sir John just as they are about to string him up. He's on his way to the gallows, calmly puffing a cigarette and whispering L.S.M.F.T.

GRACIE: That's the end of the story?

ARCHIE: No, the end is beautiful. Sir John is on the gallows swinging gaily on the end of a rope while the band plays "Holiday For Strings." Well, what do you think, Gracie?

GRACIE: Hmm! (*et cetera*)

Solution to "Guess Who?"

Albert (christened Rudolph) Campion is the criminologist *par excellence* with the shadowy background. Created by Margery Allingham and the hero of many tales from her gifted pen, Albert Campion has contributed generously to the advancement of deductive fiction. The next issue of EQMM (May 1945, on sale late in March) will contain a Campion story never before published in the United States. Watch for it — it is called *The Meaning of the Act.*

Nicholas Blake is the pen-name of Cecil Day Lewis, one of the best known, along with W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, of the younger British poets. No less an authority than Edgar Allan Poe once divined the inextricable relationship between poetry and literary ratiocination . . .

Of Nicholas Blake's detective-story writing, John Strachey has said: "He writes even better when he is, presumably, pot-boiling as Nicholas Blake than when he is 'giving himself to literature' as Day Lewis." Howard Haycraft considers him "a major figure and force in the modern detective story," and rates his book, THE BEAST MUST DIE, *one of the outstanding detective novels of the past decade.*

With this introduction, can you resist plunging into Mr. Blake's "The Assassins' Club?" — especially when your Editor adds that, to the best of his knowledge, "The Assassins' Club" is the first short story about detective Nigel Strangeways ever to be published in the United States!

THE ASSASSINS' CLUB

by NICHOLAS BLAKE

"No," thought Nigel Strangeways, looking round the table, "no one would ever guess."

Ever since, quarter of an hour ago, they had assembled in the anteroom for sherry, Nigel had been feeling more and more nervous — a nervousness greater than the prospect of having to make an after-dinner speech seemed to warrant. It was true that, as the guest of honor, something more than the usual postprandial conviviality would be expected of him. And of course the company present would, from its nature, be especially critical. But still, he had done this sort of thing often enough before; he knew he was pretty good at it. Why the acute state of jitters, then? After it was all over, Nigel was tempted to substitute "foreboding" for "jitters"; to wonder whether he oughtn't to have proclaimed these very curious feelings, like Cassandra, from the house-top — even at the risk of spoiling what looked like being a real peach of a dinner party. After all, the dinner party did get spoiled, anyway, and soon enough, too. But, taking all things into consideration, it probably wouldn't have made any difference.

It was in an attempt to dispel this cloud of uneasiness that Nigel began to play with himself the old game of identity-guessing. There was a curious uniformity among the faces of the majority of the twenty-odd diners. The women — there were only three of them — looked homely, humorous, dowdy-and-be-damned-to-it. The men, Nigel finally decided, resembled in the mass sanitary inspectors or very minor Civil Servants. They were most of them rather undersized, and ran to

drooping moustaches, gold-rimmed spectacles and a general air of mild ineffectualness. There were exceptions, of course. That elderly man in the middle of the table, with the face of a dyspeptic and superannuated bloodhound — it was not difficult to place him; even without the top-hat or the wig with which the public normally associated him, Lord Justice Pottinger could easily be recognized — the most celebrated criminal judge of his generation. Then that leonine, mobile face on his left; it had been as much photographed as any society beauty's; and well it might, for Sir Eldred Travers' golden tongue had — it was whispered — saved as many murderers as Justice Pottinger had hanged. There were one or two other exceptions, such as the dark-haired, poetic-looking young man sitting on Nigel's right and rolling bread-pellets.

"No," said Nigel, aloud this time, "no one would possibly guess."

"Guess what?" inquired the young man.

"The bloodthirsty character of this assembly." He took up the menu-card, at the top of which was printed in red letters

THE ASSASSINS

Dinner, December 20th.

"No," laughed the young man, "we don't look like murderers, I must admit — not even murderers by proxy."

"Good lord! are you in the trade, too?"

"Yes. Ought to have introduced myself. Name of Herbert Dale."

Nigel looked at the young man with increased interest. Dale had published only two crime-novels, but he was already accepted as one of the *élite* of detective writers; he could not otherwise have been a member of that most exclusive of clubs, the Assassins; for, apart from a representative of the Bench, the Bar, and Scotland Yard, this club was composed solely of the princes of detective fiction.

It was at this point that Nigel observed two things — that the hand which incessantly rolled bread-pellets was shaking, and that, on the glossy surface of the menu-card Dale had just laid down, there was a moist finger-mark.

"Are you making a speech, too?" Nigel said.

"Me? Good lord, no. Why?"

"I thought you looked nervous," said Nigel, in his direct way.

The young man laughed, a little too loudly. And, as though that was some kind of signal, one of those unrehearsed total silences fell upon the company. Even in the street outside, the noises seemed to be damped, as though an enormous soft pedal had been pressed down on everything. Nigel realized that it must have been snowing since he came in. A disagreeable sensation of eeriness crept over him. Annoyed with this sensation — a detective has no right to feel psychic, he reflected angrily, not even a private detective so celebrated as Nigel Strangeways — he forced himself to look round the brilliantly lighted

room, the animated yet oddly neutral-looking faces of the diners, the *maître d'hôtel* in his white gloves — bland and uncreased as his own face, the impassive waiters. Everything was perfectly normal; and yet . . . Some motive he was never after able satisfactorily to explain forced him to let drop into the yawning silence:

"What a marvellous setting this would be for a murder."

If Nigel had been looking in the right direction at that moment, things might have happened very differently. As it was, he didn't even notice the way Dale's wineglass suddenly tilted and spilt a few drops of sherry.

At once the whole table buzzed again with conversation. A man three places away on Nigel's right raised his head, which had been almost buried in his soup plate, and said:

"Tchah! This is the one place where a murder would never happen. My respected colleagues are men of peace. I doubt if any of them has the guts to say boo to a goose. Oh, yes, they'd *like* to be men of action, tough guys. But, I ask you, just look at them! That's why they became detective-story writers. Wish-fulfilment, the psychoanalysts call it — though I don't give much for that gang, either. But it's quite safe, spilling blood, as long as you only do it on paper."

The man turned his thick lips and small, arrogant eyes towards Nigel. "The trouble with you amateur investigators is that you're so romantic. That's why the police beat you to it every time."

A thick-set, swarthy man opposite him exclaimed: "You're wrong there, Mr. Carruthers. We don't seem to have beaten Mr. Strangeways to it in the past every time."

"So our aggressive friend is *the* David Carruthers. Well, well," whispered Nigel to Dale.

"Yes," said Dale, not modifying his tone at all. "A squalid fellow, isn't he? But he gets the public all right. We have sold our thousands, but David has sold his tens of thousands. Got a yellow streak though, I'll bet, in spite of his bluster. Pity somebody doesn't bump him off at this dinner, just to show him he's not the Mr. Infallible he sets up to be."

Carruthers shot a vicious glance at Dale. "Why not try it yourself? Get you a bit of notoriety, anyway; might even sell your books. Though," he continued, clapping on the shoulder a nondescript little man who was sitting between him and Dale, "I think little Crippen here would be my first bet. You'd like to have my blood, Crippen, wouldn't you?"

The little man said stiffly: "Don't make yourself ridiculous, Carruthers. You must be drunk already. And I'd thank you to remember that my name is Cripps."

At this point the president interposed with a convulsive change of subject, and the dinner resumed its even tenor. While they were disposing of some very tolerable trout, a waiter informed Dale that he was wanted on the telephone. The young man went out. Nigel was trying at the same

time to listen to a highly involved story of the president's and decipher the very curious expression on Cripps' face, when all the lights went out too. . . .

There were a few seconds of astonished silence. Then a torrent of talk broke out — the kind of forced jocularity with which man still comforts himself in the face of sudden darkness. Nigel could hear movement all around him, the pushing back of chairs, quick, muffled treads on the carpet — waiters, no doubt. Someone at the end of the table, rather ridiculously, struck a match; it did nothing but emphasize the pitch-blackness.

"Stevens, can't someone light the candles?" exclaimed the president irritably.

"Excuse me, sir," came the voice of the *maître d'hôtel*, "there are no candles. Harry, run along to the fuse-box and find out what's gone wrong."

The door banged behind the waiter. Less than a minute later the lights all blazed on again. Blinking, like swimmers come up from a deep dive, the diners looked at each other. Nigel observed that Carruther's face was even nearer his food than usual. Curious, to go on eating all the time — But no, his head was right on top of the food — lying in the plate like John the Baptist's. And from between his shoulder-blades there stood out a big white handle; the handle — good God! it couldn't be; this was too macabre altogether — but it *was* — the handle of a fish-slice.

A kind of gobbling noise came out of Justice Pottinger's mouth. All eyes turned to where his shaking hand pointed, grew wide with horror, and then turned ludicrously back to him, as though he was about to direct the jury.

"God bless my soul!" was all the Judge could say.

But someone had sized up the whole situation. The thick-set man who had been sitting opposite Carruthers was already standing with his back to the door. His voice snapped:

"Stay where you are, everyone. I'm afraid there's no doubt about this. I must take charge of this case at once. Mr. Strangeways, will you go and ring up Scotland Yard — police surgeon, fingerprint men, photographers — the whole bag of tricks; you know what we want."

Nigel sprang up. His gaze, roving around the room, had registered something different, some detail missing; but his mind couldn't identify it. Well, perhaps it would come to him later. He moved towards the door. And just then the door opened brusquely, pushing the thick-set man away from it. There was a general gasp, as though everyone expected to see something walk in with blood on its hands. It was only young Dale, a little white in the face, but grinning amiably.

"What on earth — ?" he began. Then he, too, saw . . .

An hour later, Nigel and the thick-set man, Superintendent Bateman,

were alone in the anteroom. The princes of detective fiction were huddled together in another room, talking in shocked whispers.

"Don't like the real thing, do they, sir?" the Superintendent had commented sardonically; "do 'em good to be up against a flesh-and-blood problem for once. I wish 'em luck with it."

"Well," he was saying now. "Doesn't seem like much of a loss to the world, this Carruthers. None of 'em got a good word for him. Too much food, too much drink, too many women. But that doesn't give us a motive. Now this Cripps. Carruthers said Cripps would like to have his blood. Why was that, d'you suppose?"

"You can search me. Cripps wasn't giving anything away when we interviewed him."

"He had enough opportunity. All he had to do when the lights went out was to step over to the buffet, take up the first knife he laid hands on — probably thought the fish-slice was a carving-knife — stab him, and sit down and twiddle his fingers."

"Yes, he could have wrapped his handkerchief round the handle. That would account for there being no fingerprints. And there's no one to swear he moved from his seat; Dale was out of the room — and it's a bit late now to ask Carruthers, who was on his other side. But, if he *did* do it, everything happened very luckily for him."

"Then there's young Dale himself," said Bateman, biting the side of his thumb. "Talked a lot of hot air about bumping Carruthers off before it happened. Might be a double bluff. You see, Mr. Strangeways, there's no doubt about that waiter's evidence. The main switch was thrown over. Now, what about this? Dale arranged to be called up during dinner; answers call; then goes and turns off the main switch — in gloves, I suppose, because there's only the waiter's fingerprints on it — comes back under cover of darkness, stabs his man, and goes out again."

"Mm," ruminated Nigel, "but the motive? And where are the gloves? And why, if it was premeditated, such an outlandish weapon?"

"If he's hidden the gloves, we'll find 'em soon enough. And—" the Superintendent was interrupted by the tinkle of the telephone at his elbow. A brief dialogue ensued. Then he turned to Nigel.

"Man I sent round to interview Morton — bloke who rang Dale up at dinner. Swears he was talking to Dale for three to five minutes. That seems to let Dale out, unless it was collusion."

That moment a plainclothes man entered, a grin of ill-concealed triumph on his face. He handed a rolled-up pair of black kid gloves to Bateman. "Tucked away behind the pipes in the lavatories, sir."

Bateman unrolled them. There were stains on the fingers. He glanced inside the wrists, then passed the gloves to Nigel, pointing at some initials stamped there.

"Well, well," said Nigel. "H. D.

Let's have him in again. Looks as if that telephone call *was* collusion."

"Yes, we've got him now."

But when the young man entered and saw the gloves lying on the table his reactions were very different from what the Superintendent had expected. An expression of relief, instead of the spasm of guilt, passed over his face.

"Stupid of me," he said, "I lost my head for a few minutes, after — But I'd better start at the beginning. Carruthers was always bragging about his nerve and the tight corners he's been in and so on. A poisonous specimen. So Morton and I decided to play a practical joke on him. He was to phone me up; I was to go out and throw the main switch, then come back and pretend to strangle Carruthers from behind — just give him a thorough shaking-up — and leave a bloodcurdling message on his plate to the effect that this was just a warning, and next time the Unknown would do the thing properly. We reckoned he'd be gibbering with fright when I turned up the lights again! Well, everything went all right till I came up behind him; but then — then I happened to touch that knife, and I knew somebody had been there before me, in earnest. Afraid, I lost my nerve then, especially when I found I'd got some of his blood on my gloves. So I hid them, and burnt the spoof message. Damn silly of me. The whole idea was damn silly, I can see that now."

"Why gloves at all?" asked Nigel.

"Well, they say it's your hands and your shirt-front that are likely to show in the dark; so I put on black gloves and pinned my coat over my shirt-front. And, I say," he added in a deprecating way, "I don't want to teach you fellows your business, but if I had really meant to kill him, would I have worn gloves with my initials on them?"

"That is as may be," said Bateman coldly, "but I must warn you that you are in —"

"Just a minute," Nigel interrupted. "Why should Cripps have wanted Carruthers's blood?"

"Oh, you'd better ask Cripps. If he won't tell you, I don't think I ought to —"

"Don't be a fool. You're in a damned tight place, and you can't afford to be chivalrous."

"Very well. Little Cripps may be dim, but he's a good sort. He told me once, in confidence, that Carruthers had pirated an idea of his for a plot and made a best-seller out of it. A rotten thing to do. But — dash it — no one would commit murder just because —"

"You must leave that for us to decide, Mr. Dale," said the Superintendent.

When the young man had gone out, under the close surveillance of a constable, Bateman turned wearily to Nigel.

"Well," he said, "it may be him; and it may be Cripps. But with all these crime-authors about, it might be any of 'em."

Nigel leapt up from his seat. "Yes," he exclaimed, "and that's why we've not thought of anyone else. And" — his eyes lit up — "by Jove! now I've remembered it — the missing detail. Quick! Are all those waiters and chaps still there?"

"Yes; we've kept 'em in the dining-room. But what the —?"

Nigel ran into the dining-room, Bateman at his heels. He looked out of one of the windows, open at the top.

"What's down below there?" he asked the *maître d'hôtel*.

"A yard, sir; the kitchen windows look out on it."

"And now, where was Sir Eldred Travers sitting?"

The man pointed to the place without hesitation, his imperturbable face betraying not the least surprise.

"Right; will you go and ask him to step this way for a minute. Oh, by the way," he added, as the *maître d'hôtel* reached the door, "*where are your gloves?*"

The man's eyes flickered. "My gloves, sir?"

"Yes; before the lights went out you were wearing white gloves; after they went up again, I remembered it just now, you were not wearing them. Are they in the yard by any chance?"

The man shot a desperate glance around him; then the bland composure of his face broke up. He collapsed, sobbing, into a chair.

"My daughter — he ruined her — she killed herself. When the lights went out, it was too much for me — the opportunity. He deserved it. I'm not sorry."

"Yes," said Nigel, ten minutes later, "it was too much for him. He picked up the first weapon at hand. Afterwards, knowing everyone would be searched, he had to throw the gloves out of the window. There would be blood on them. With luck we mightn't have looked in the yard before he could get out to remove them. And, unless one was looking, one wouldn't see them against the snow. They were white."

"What was that about Sir Eldred Travers?" asked the Superintendent.

"Oh, I wanted to put him off his guard, and to get him away from the window. He might have tried to follow his gloves."

"Well, that fish-slice might have been a slice of bad luck for young Dale if you hadn't been here," said the Superintendent, venturing on a witticism. "What are you grinning away to yourself about?"

"I was just thinking, this must be the first time a Judge has been present at a murder."

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THE PRINCE WHO WAS A THIEF

by THEODORE DREISER

As THEY gathered about him in the market-place, Gazzar-al-Din, the mendicant story-teller, thumped his tambour louder and louder, exclaiming: "A marvelous tale, O Company of the Faithful! A marvelous tale! Hearken! A tale such as has never yet been told in all Hodeidah — no, not in all Yemen! 'A Prince Who Was a Thief.' For a score of anna — yea, the fourth part of a rupee — I begin. As jasmine, it is fragrant; as khat, soothing. A marvelous tale!"

"Ay-ee, but how is one to know that," observed Ahmed, the carpet-weaver, to Chudi, the tailor, with whom he had drawn near. "There are many who promise excellent tales but how few who tell them."

"It is even as thou sayst, O Ahmed. Often have I hearkened and given anna in plenty, yet few there are whose tales are worth the hearing."

"Why not begin thy tale, O Kowasji?" inquired Soudi, the carrier. "Then if, as thou sayst, it is so excellent, will not anna enough be thine? There are tellers of tales, and tellers of tales —"

"Yea, and that I would," replied the mendicant artfully, "were all as honest as thou lookest and as kind. Yet have I traveled far without food, and I know not where I may rest this night. . . . A tale of the great caliph and the Princess Yanee and the noble Yussuf, stolen and found again. And the great treasury sealed and guarded,

yet entered and robbed by one who was not found. Anna — but a score of anna, and I begin! What? Are all in Hodeidah so poor that a tale of love and pleasure and danger and great palaces and great princes and caliphs and thieves can remain untold for the want of a few anna — for so many as ten dropped into my tambour? A marvelous tale! A marvelous tale!"

"Begin then," said Azad Bakht, the barber. "Here is an anna for thee," and he tossed a coin in the tambour.

"And here is another for thee," observed Haifa, the tobacco vendor, fishing in his purse. "I do not mind risking it."

Gazzar then crouched upon his rags, lifted his hand for silence, and began:

"Know then, O excellent citizens of Hodeidah, that once, many years since, there lived in this very Yemen where now is Taif, then a much more resplendent city, a sultan by the name of Kar-Shem, who had great cities and palaces and an army, and was beloved of all over whom he ruled. When he — wilt thou be seated, O friend? And silence! — when he was but newly married and ruling happily, a son was born to him, Hussein, an infant of so great charm and beauty that he decided he should be carefully reared and wisely trained and so made into a fit ruler for so great a country. But, as it chanced, there was a rival or claimant to this same throne by another line, a branch long since deposed by the ancestors of this same king, and he it was, Bab-el-Bar by name, who was determined that the young Prince Hussein should be stolen and disposed of in some way so that he should never return and claim the throne. One day, when the prince was only four years of age, the summer palace was attacked and the princeling captured. From thence he was carried over great wastes of sand to Baghdad, where he was duly sold as a slave to a man who was looking for such, for he was a great and successful thief, one who trained thieves from their infancy up so that they should never know what virtue was."

"Ay-ee, there are such," interrupted Ahmed, the carpet-weaver, loudly, for his place had only recently been robbed.

"Once the Prince Hussein was in the hands of this thief, he was at once housed with those who stole, who in turn taught him. One of the tricks which Yussuf, the master thief, employed was to take each of his neophytes in turn at the age of seven, dress him in a yarn jacket, lower him into a dry cistern from which there was no means of escape, place a large ring-cake upon a beam across the top and tell him to obtain the cake or starve. Many starved for days and were eventually dismissed as unworthy of his skill. But when the young Prince Hussein was lowered he meditated upon his state. At last he unraveled a part of his yarn jacket, tied a pebble to it and threw it so that it fell through the hole of the cake, and thus he was able to pull it down. At this Yussuf was so pleased that he had him drawn up and given a rare meal.

"One day Yussuf, hearing good reports from those who were training Hussein in thieving, took him to the top of a hill traversed by a road, where, seeing a peasant carrying a sheep on his back approaching, Yussuf Ben Ali asked of Hussein, now renamed Abou so that he might not be found: 'How shall we get the sheep without the peasant learning that we have taken it?' Trained by fear of punishment to use his wits, Abou, after some thought replied: 'When thou seest the sheep alone, take it!' Stealing from the thicket, he placed one of his shoes in the road and then hid. The peasant came and saw the shoe, but left it lying there because there was but one. Abou ran out and picked up the shoe, reappearing from the wood far ahead of the peasant where he put down the mate to the first shoe and then hid again. The peasant came and examined the shoe, then tied his sheep to a stake and ran back for the first one. Yussuf, seeing the sheep alone, now came out and hurried off with it, while Abou followed, picking up the last shoe. The peasant coming back to where he had seen the first shoe, and not finding it, was dazed and ran back to his sheep, to find that that and the second shoe were gone. Yussuf was much pleased and when they returned to the city Yussuf decided to adopt Abou as his son." Gazzar now paused upon seeing the interest of his hearers and held out his tambour. "Anna, O friends, anna! Is not the teller of tales, the sweetener of weariness, worthy of his hire? I have less than a score of anna, and ten will buy no more than a bowl of curds or a cup of kishr, and the road I have traveled has been long. So much as the right to sleep in a stall with the camels is held at ten anna, and I am no longer young." He moved the tambour about appealingly.

"Dog!" growled Soudi. "Must thy tambour be filled before we hear more?"

"Bismillah! This is no story-teller but a robber," declared Parfi.

Some three of the listeners who had not yet contributed anything dropped each an anna into his tambour.

"Now," continued Gazzar somewhat gloomily, seeing how small were his earnings for all his art, "aside from stealing and plundering caravans upon the great desert, and the murdering of men for their treasure, the great Yussuf conducted a rug bazaar as a blind for more thievery and murder. Once he had adopted Abou as his son, Yussuf dressed him in silks and took him to his false rug market, where he introduced him with a great flourish as one who would continue his affairs after he, Yussuf, was no more. He called his slaves and said: 'Behold thy master after myself. When I am not here, or by chance am no more — praise be to Allah, the good, the great! — see that thou obey him, for I have found him very wise.'

"Soon Yussuf disguised himself as a dervish and departed upon a new venture; and soon after there happened to Abou a great thing. For it should be known that at this time there ruled in Baghdad the great and wise Yianko I., Caliph of the Faithful in the valleys

of the Euphrates and the Tigris and master of provinces and principalities, and the possessor of an enormous treasury of gold, which was in a great building of stone. Also he possessed a palace of such beauty that travelers came from many parts and far countries to see. It was here, with his many wives and concubines and slaves and courtiers, and many wise men come from far parts of the world to advise with him and bring him wisdom, that he ruled and was beloved and admired.

"Now by his favorite wife, Atrisha, there had been born to him some thirteen years before the beautiful and tender and delicate and loving and much-beloved Yanee, the sweetest and fairest of all his daughters, whom from the very first he designed should be the wife of some great prince. Her hair was as spun gold, her teeth as pearls of the greatest price, lustrous and delicate; her skin as the bright moon when it rises in the east, and her hands and feet as petals in full bloom. Her lips were as the pomegranate when it is newly cut, and her eyes as those deep pools into which the moon looks when it is night."

"Yea, I have heard of such, in fairy-tales," sighed Chudi, the baker, whose wife was as parchment that has cracked with age.

"Now at the time that Abou was in charge of the dark bazaar it chanced that the caliph, who annually arranged for the departure of his daughter for the mountains which are beyond Azol in Bactria, where he maintained a summer palace, sent forth a vast company mounted upon elephants and camels out of Ullar and Cerf and horses of the rarest blood from Taif. This company was caparisoned and swathed in silks and thin wool and the braided and spun cloth of Esher and Bar with their knitted threads of gold. And it made a glorious spectacle indeed, and all paused to behold. But it also chanced that as this cavalcade passed through the streets of Baghdad, Abou, hearing a great tumult and the cries of the multitude and the drivers and the tramp of the horses' feet and the pad of the camels', came to the door of his bazaar, his robes of silk about him, a turban of rare cloth knitted with silver threads upon his head. He had now grown to be a youth of eighteen summers. His hair was as black as the wing of the uck, his eyes large and dark and sad from many thoughts as is the pool into which the moon falls. His face and hands were tinted as with henna when it is spread very thin, and his manners were graceful and languorous. As he paused within his doorway he looked wonderingly at the great company as it moved and disappeared about the curves of the longstreet.

"Yet, even as he gazed, so strange are the ways of Allah, there passed a camel, its houdah heavy with rich silks, and ornaments of the rarest within, but without disguised as humble, so that none might guess. And within was the beautiful Princess Yanee, hidden darkly behind folds of fluttering silk, her face and forehead covered to her starry eyes, as is prescribed, and even these veiled. Yet so strange are the ways of life

and of Allah that, being young and full of wonder, she was at this very moment engaged in peeping out from behind her veils, the while the bright panorama of the world was passing. And as she looked, behold, there was Abou, gazing upon her fine accoutrements. So lithe was his form and so deep his eyes and so fair his face that, transfixed as by a beam, her heart melted and without thought she threw back her veil and parted the curtains of the houdah the better to see, and the better that he might see. And Abou, seeing the curtains put to one side and the vision of eyes that were as pools and the cheeks as the leaf of the rose shine upon him, was transfixed and could no longer move or think.

"Then bethinking himself that he might never more see her, he awoke and ran after, throwing one citizen and another to the right and the left. When at last he came up to the camel of his fair one, guarded by eunuchs and slaves, he drew one aside and said softly: 'Friend, be not wrathful and I will give thee a hundred dinars in gold do thou, within such time as thou canst, report to me at the bazaar of Yussuf, the rug-merchant, who it is that rides within this houdah. Ask thou only for Abou. No more will I ask.' The slave, noting his fine robes and the green-and-silver turban, thought him to be no less than a noble, and replied: 'Young master, be not overcurious. Remember the vengeance of the caliph. . . . 'Yet dinars have I to give.' . . . 'I will yet come to thee.'

"Abou was enraptured by even so little as this, and yet dejected also by the swift approach and departure of joy. 'For what am I now?' he asked himself. 'But a moment since, I was whole and one who could find delight in all things that were given me to do; but now I am as one who is lost and knows not his way.'

"Thereafter, for all of a moon, Abou was as one in a dream, wandering here and there drearily, bethinking him how he was ever to know more of the face that had appeared to him through the curtains of the houdah. And whether the driver of the camel would ever return. As day after day passed and there was no word, he grew thin and began to despair and to grow weary of life. At last there came to his shop an aged man, long of beard and dusty of garb, who inquired for Abou. And being shown him said: 'I would speak with thee alone.' And when Abou drew him aside he said: 'Dost thou recall the procession of the caliph's daughter to Ish-Pari in the mountains beyond Azol?' And Abou answered, 'Ay, by Allah!' 'And dost thou recall one of whom thou madest inquiry?' 'Aye,' replied Abou, vastly stirred. 'I asked who it was that was being borne aloft in state.' 'And what was the price for that knowledge?' 'A hundred dinars.' 'Keep thy dinars — or, better yet, give them to me that I may give them to the poor, for I bring thee news. She who was in the houdah was none other than the Princess Yanee, daughter of the caliph and heir to all his realm. But keep thou thy counsel and all thought of this

visit and let no one know of thy inquiry. There are many who watch, and death may yet be thy portion and mine. Yet, since thou art as thou art, young and without knowledge of life, here is a spray of the myrtles of Ish-Pari — but thou art to think no further on anything thou hast seen or heard. And thou dost not — death!' He made the sign of three fingers to the forehead and the neck and gave Abou the spray, receiving in return the gold.

"Knowing that the myrtle was from the princess, and that henceforth he might seek but durst not even so much as breathe of what he thought or knew, Abou sighed and returned to his place in the bazaar.

"But now, Yussuf, returning not long after from a far journey, came to Abou with a bold thought. For it related to no other thing than the great treasury of the caliph, which stood in the heart of the city before the public market, and was sealed and guarded and built of stone and carried the wealth of an hundred provinces. Besides, it was now the time of the taking of tithes throughout the caliphate, as Yussuf knew, and the great treasury was filled to the roof, or so it was said, with golden dinars. It was a four-square building of heavy stone, with lesser squares superimposed one above the other after the fashion of pyramids. On each level was a parapet, and upon each side of every parapet as well as on the ground below there walked two guards, each first away from the centre of their side to the end and then back, meeting at the centre to reverse and return. And on each side and on each level were two other guards. No two of these, of any level or side, were permitted to arrive at the centre or the ends of their parapet at the same time as those of the parapets above or below, lest any portion of the treasury be left unguarded. There was but one entrance, which was upon the ground and facing the market. And through this no one save the caliph or the caliph's treasurer or his delegated aides might enter. The guards ascended and descended via a guarded stair. Anna, O friends," pleaded Gazzar once more, "for now comes the wonder of the robbing of the great treasury — the wit and subtlety of Abou — and craft and yet confusion of the treasurer and the caliph — anna! — A few miserable anna!"

"Jackal!" shouted Azad Bakht, getting up. "Thou robbest worse than any robber! Hast thou a treasury of thine own that thou hopest to fill?"

"Be not unkind, O friends," pleaded Gazzar soothingly. "As thou seest, I have but twenty annas — not the price of a meal, let alone of a bed. But ten — but — five — and I proceed."

"Come, then, here they are," cried Al Hadjaz, casting down four; and Zad-el-Din and Haifa and Chudi each likewise added one, and Gazzar swiftly gathered them up and continued:

"Yussuf, who had long contemplated this wondrous storehouse, had also long racked his wits as to how it

might be entered and a portion of the gold taken. Also he had counseled with many of his pupils, but in vain. No one had solved the riddle for him. Yet one day as he and Abou passed the treasury on their way to the mosque for the look of honor, Yussuf said to Abou: 'Bethink thee, my son; here is a marvelous building, carefully constructed and guarded. How wouldst thou come to the store of gold within?' Abou, whose thoughts were not upon the building but upon Yanee, betrayed no look of surprise at the request, so accustomed was he to having difficult and fearsome matters put before him, but gazed upon it so calmly that Yussuf exclaimed: 'How now? Hast thou a plan?' 'Never have I given it a thought, O Yussuf,' replied Abou; 'but if it is thy wish, let us go and look more closely.'

"Accordingly, through the crowds of merchants and strangers and donkeys and the veiled daughters of the harem and the idlers generally, they approached and surveyed it. At once Abou observed the movement of the guards, saw that as the guards of one tier were walking away from each other those of the tiers above or below were walking toward each other. And although the one entrance to the treasury was well guarded still there was a vulnerable spot, which was the crowning cupola, also four-square and flat, where none walked or looked. 'It is difficult,' he said after a time, 'but it can be done. Let me think.'

"Accordingly, after due meditation and without consulting Yussuf, he disguised himself as a dispenser of fodder for camels, secured a rope of silk, four bags and an iron hook. Returning to his home he caused the hook to be covered with soft cloth so that its fall would make no sound, then fastened it to one end of the silken cord and said to Yussuf: 'Come now and let us try this.' Yussuf, curious as to what Abou could mean, went with him and together they tried their weight upon it to see if it would hold. Then Abou, learning by observation the hour at night wherein the guards were changed, and choosing a night without moon or stars, disguised himself and Yussuf as watchmen of the city and went to the treasury. Though it was as well guarded as ever they stationed themselves in an alley nearby. And Abou, seeing a muleteer approaching and wishing to test his disguise, ordered him away and he went. Then Abou, watching the guards who were upon the ground meet and turn, and seeing those upon the first tier still in the distance but pacing toward the centre, gave a word to Yussuf and they ran forward, threw the hook over the rim of the first tier and then drew themselves up quickly, hanging there above the lower guards until those of the first tier met and turned. Then they climbed over the wall and repeated this trick upon the guards of the second tier, the third and fourth, until at last they were upon the roof of the cupola where they lay flat. Then Abou, who was prepared, unscrewed one of the plates of the dome, hooked the cord over the side and whispered: 'Now, master, which?' Yussuf, ever cautious in his

life, replied: 'Go thou and report.'

"Slipping down the rope, Abou at last came upon a great store of gold and loose jewels piled in heaps, from which he filled the bags he had brought. These he fastened to the rope and ascended. Yussuf, astounded by the sight of so much wealth, was for making many trips, but Abou, detecting a rift where shone a star, urged that they cease for the night. Accordingly, after having fastened these at their waists and the plate to the roof as it had been, they descended as they had come."

"A rare trick," commented Zad-el-Din.

"Thus for three nights," continued Gazzar, "they succeeded in robbing the treasury, taking from it many thousands of dinars and jewels. On the fourth night, however, a guard saw them hurrying away and gave the alarm. At that, Abou and Yussuf turned here and there in strange ways, Yussuf betaking himself to his home, while Abou fled to his master's shop. Once there he threw off the disguise of a guard and reappeared as an aged vendor of rugs and was asked by the pursuing guards if he had seen anybody enter his shop. Abou motioned them to the rear of the shop, where they were bound and removed by Yussuf's robber slaves. Others of the guards, however, had betaken themselves to their captain and reported, who immediately informed the treasurer. Torches were brought and a search made, and then he repaired to the caliph. The latter, much astonished that no trace of the entrance or departure of the thieves could be found, sent for a master thief recently taken in crime and sentenced to be gibbeted, and said to him:

" 'Wouldst thou have thy life?'

" 'Aye, if thy grace will yield it.'

" 'Look you,' said the caliph. 'Our treasury has but now been robbed and there is no trace. Solve me this mystery within the moon, and thy life, though not thy freedom, is thine.'

" 'O Protector of the Faithful,' said the thief, 'do thou but let me see within the treasury.'

"And so, chained and in care of the treasurer himself and the caliph, he was taken to the treasury. Looking about him he at length saw a faint ray penetrating through the plate that had been loosed in the dome.

" 'O Guardian of the Faithful,' said the thief wisely and hopefully, 'do thou place a cauldron of hot pitch under this dome and then see if the thief is not taken.'

"Thereupon the caliph did as advised, the while the treasury was resealed and fresh guards set to watch and daily the pitch was renewed, only Abou and Yussuf came not. Yet in due time, the avarice of Yussuf growing, they chose another night in the dark of the second moon and repaired once more to the treasury, where, so lax already had become the watch, they mounted to the dome. Abou, upon removing the plate, at once detected the odor of pitch and advised Yussuf not to descend, but he would none of this. The thought of the gold and jewels into which on

previous nights he had dipped urged him, and he descended. However, when he neared the gold he reached for it, but instead of gold he seized the scalding pitch, which when it burned, caused him to loose his hold and fall. He cried to Abou: 'I burn in hot pitch. Help me!' Abou descended and took the hand but felt it waver and grow slack. Knowing that death was at hand and that should Yussuf's body be found not only himself but Yussuf's wife and slaves would all suffer, he drew his scimitar, which was ever at his belt, and struck off the head. Fastening this to his belt, he re-ascended the rope, replaced the plate and carefully made his way from the treasury. He then went to the house of Yussuf and gave the head to Yussuf's wife, cautioning her to secrecy.

"But the caliph, coming now every day with his treasurer to look at the treasury, was amazed to find it sealed and yet the headless body within. Knowing not how to solve the mystery of this body, he ordered the thief before him, who advised him to hang the body in the marketplace and set guards to watch any who might come to mourn or spy. Accordingly, the headless body was gibbeted and set up in the marketplace where Abou, passing afar, recognized it. Fearing that Mirza, the wife of Yussuf, who was of the tribe of the Veddi, upon whom it is obligatory that they mourn in the presence of the dead, should come to mourn here, he hastened to caution her. 'Go thou not thither,' he said; 'or, if thou must, fill two bowls with milk and go as a seller of it. If thou must weep drop one of the bowls as if by accident and make as if thou wept over that.' Mirza accordingly filled two bowls and passing near the gibbet in the public square dropped one and thereupon began weeping as her faith demanded. The guards, noting her, thought nothing — 'for here is one,' said they, 'so poor that she cries because of her misfortune.' But the caliph, calling for the guards at the end of the day to report to himself and the master thief, inquired as to what they had seen. 'We saw none,' said the chief of the guard, 'save an old woman so poor that she wept for the breaking of a bowl!' 'Dolts!' cried the master thief. 'Pigs! Did I not say take any who came to mourn? She is the widow of the thief. Try again. Scatter gold pieces under the gibbet and take any that touch them.'

"The guards scattered gold, as was commanded, and took their positions. Abou, pleased that the widow had been able to mourn and yet not be taken, came now to see what more might be done by the caliph. Seeing the gold he said: 'It is with that he wishes to tempt.' At once his pride in his skill was aroused and he determined to take some of the gold and yet not be taken. To this end he disguised himself as a ragged young beggar and one weak of wit, and with the aid of an urchin younger than himself and as wretched he began to play about the square, running here and there as if in some game. But before doing this he had fastened to the

sole of his shoes a thick gum so that the gold might stick. The guards, deceived by the seeming youth and foolishness of Abou and his friend, said: 'These are but a child and a fool. They take no gold.' But by night, coming to count the gold, there were many pieces missing and they were sore afraid. When they reported to the caliph that night he had them flogged and new guards placed in their stead. Yet again he consulted with the master thief, who advised him to load a camel with enticing riches and have it led through the streets of the city by seeming strangers who were the worse for wine. 'This thief who eludes thee will be tempted by these riches and seek to rob them.'

"Soon after it was Abou, who, prowling about the market-place, noticed this camel laden with great wealth and led by seeming strangers. But because it was led to no particular market he thought that it must be of the caliph. He decided to take this also, for there was in his blood that which sought contest, and by now he wished the caliph, because of Yanee, to fix his thought upon him. He filled a skin with the best of wine, into which he placed a drug of the dead Yussuf's devising, and dressing himself as a shabby vendor, set forth. When he came to the street in which was the camel and saw how the drivers idled and gaped, he began to cry, 'Wine for a para! A drink of wine for a para!' The drivers drank and found it good, following Abou as he walked, drinking and chaffering with him and laughing at his dumbness, until they were within a door of the house of Mirza, the wife of the dead Yussuf, where was a gate giving into a secret court. Pausing before this until the wine should take effect, he suddenly began to gaze upward and then to point. The drivers looked but saw nothing. And the drug taking effect they fell down; whereupon Abou quickly led the camel into the court and closed the gate. When he returned and found the drivers still asleep he shaved off half the hair of their heads and their beards, then disappeared and changed his dress and joined those who were now laughing at the strangers in their plight, for they had awakened and were running here and there in search of a camel and its load and unaware of their grotesque appearance. Mirza, in order to remove all traces, had the camel killed and the goods distributed. A careful woman and housewifely, she had caused all the fat to be boiled from the meat and preserved in jars, it having a medicinal value. The caliph, having learned how it had gone with his camel, now meditated anew on how this great thief, who mocked him and who was of great wit, might be taken. Calling the master thief and others in council he recited the entire tale and asked how this prince of thieves might be caught. 'Try but one more ruse, O master,' said the master thief, who was now greatly shaken and feared for his life. 'Do thou send an old woman from house to house asking for camel's grease. Let her plead that it is for one who is ill. It may be that, fearing detection, the camel has been

slain and the fat preserved. If any is found, mark the door of that house with grease and take all within.'

"Accordingly an old woman was sent forth chaffering of pain. In due time she came to the house of Mirza, who gave her of the grease, and when she left she made a cross upon the door. When she returned to the caliph he called his officers and guards and all proceeded toward the marked door. In the meantime Abou, having returned and seen the mark, inquired of Mirza as to what it meant. When told of the old woman's visit he called for a bowl of the camel's grease and marked the doors in all the nearest streets. The caliph, coming into the street and seeing the marks, was both enraged and filled with awe and admiration for of such wisdom he had never known. 'I give thee thy life,' he said to the master thief, 'for now I see that thou art as nothing to this one. He is shrewd beyond the wisdom of caliphs and thieves. Let us return,' and he retraced his steps to the palace, curious as to the nature and soul of this one who could so easily outwit him.

"Time went on and the caliph one day said to his vizier: 'I have been thinking of the one who robbed the treasury and my camel and the gold from under the gibbet. Such an one is wise above his day and generation and worthy of a better task. What think you? Shall I offer him a full pardon so that he may appear and be taken — or think you he will appear?' 'Do but try it, O Commander of the Faithful,' said the vizier. A proclamation was prepared and given to the criers, who announced that it was commanded by the caliph that, should the great thief appear on the marketplace at a given hour and yield himself up, a pardon full and free would be granted him and gifts of rare value heaped upon him. Yet it was not thus that the caliph intended to do.

"Now, Abou, hearing of this and being despondent over his life and the loss of Yanee and the death of Yussuf and wishing to advantage himself in some way other than by thievery, bethought him how he might accept this offer of the caliph and declare himself and yet, supposing it were a trap to seize him, escape. Accordingly he awaited the time prescribed, and when the public square was filled with guards instructed to seize him if he appeared he donned the costume of a guard and appeared among the soldiers dressed as all the others. The caliph was present to witness the taking, and when the criers surrounding him begged the thief to appear and be pardoned, Abou called out from the thick of the throng: 'Here I am, O Caliph! Amnesty!' Whereupon the caliph, thinking that now surely he would be taken, cried: 'Seize him! Seize him!' But Abou, mingling with the others, also cried: 'Seize him! Seize him!' and looked here and there as did the others. The guards, thinking him a guard, allowed him to escape, and the caliph, once more enraged and chagrined, retired. Once within his chambers he called to him his chief ad-

visers and had prepared the following proclamation:

" 'BE IT KNOWN TO ALL

" 'Since within the boundaries of our realm there exists one so wise that despite our commands and best efforts he is still able to work his will against ours and to elude our every effort to detect him, be it known that from having been amazed and disturbed we are now pleased and gratified that one so skilful of wit and resourceful should exist in our realm. To make plain that our appreciation is now sincere and our anger allayed it is hereby covenant with him and with all our people to whom he may appeal if we fail in our word, that if he will now present himself in person and recount to one whom we shall appoint his various adventures, it will be our pleasure to signally distinguish him above others.

" 'YIANKO I.'

"This was signed by the caliph and cried in the public places. Abou heard all but because of the previous treachery of the caliph he was now unwilling to believe that this was true. At the same time he was pleased to know that he was now held in great consideration, either for good or ill, by the caliph and his advisers, and bethought him that if it were for ill perhaps by continuing to outwit the caliph he might still succeed in winning his favor and so to a further knowledge of Yanee. To this end he prepared a reply which he posted in the public square, reading:

" 'PROCLAMATION BY THE ONE WHOM THE CALIPH SEEKS

" 'Know, O Commander of the Faithful, that theone whom the caliph seeks is here among his people free from harm. He respects the will of the caliph and his good intentions, but is restrained by fear. He therefore requests that instead of being commanded to reveal himself the caliph devise a way and appoint a time where in darkness and without danger to himself he may behold the face of the one to whom he is to reveal himself. It must be that none are present to seize him.

" 'THE ONE WHOM THE CALIPH SEEKS.'

"Notice of this reply being brought to the caliph he forthwith took counsel with his advisers and decided that since it was plain the thief might not otherwise be taken, recourse must be had to a device that might be depended upon to lure him. Behind a certain window in the palace wall known as 'The Whispering Window,' and constantly used by all who were in distress or had suffered a wrong which owing to the craft of others there was no hope of righting, sat at stated times and always at night, the caliph's own daughter Yanee, whose tender heart and unseeking soul were counted upon to see to it that the saddest of stories came to the ears of the caliph. It was by this means that the caliph now hoped to capture the thief. To insure that the thief should come it was publicly announced that should any one that came be able to

tell how the treasury had been entered and the gold pieces taken from under the gibbet or the camel stolen and killed, he was to be handed a bag of many dinars and a pardon in writing; later, should he present himself, he would be made a councillor of state.

"Struck by this new proclamation and the possibility of once more beholding the princess, Abou decided to match his skill against that of the caliph. He disguised himself as a vendor of tobacco and approached the window, peered through the lattice which screened it and said: 'O daughter of the great caliph, behold one who is in distress. I am he whom the caliph seeks, either to honor or slay, I know not which. Also I am he who, on one of thy journeys to the mountain of Azol and thy palace at Ish-Pari thou beheldest while passing the door of my father's rug-market, for thou didst lift the curtains of thy houdah and also thy veil and didst deign to smile at me. And I have here,' and he touched his heart, 'a faded spray of the myrtles of Ish-Pari, or so it has been told me, over which I weep.'

"Yanee, shocked that she should be confronted with the great thief whom her father sought and that he should claim to be the beautiful youth she so well remembered, and yet fearing this to be some new device of the vizier or of the women of the harem, who might have heard of her strange love and who ever prayed evil against all who were younger or more beautiful than they, she was at a loss how to proceed. Feeling the need of wisdom and charity, she said: 'How sayst thou? Thou are the great thief whom my father seeks and yet the son of a rug-merchant on whom I smiled? Had I ever smiled on a thief, which Allah forbid, would I not remember it and thee? Therefore, if it be as thou sayst, permit it that I should have a light brought that I may behold thee.' 'Readily enough, O Princess,' replied Abou, 'only if I am thus to reveal myself to thee must I not know first that thou art the maiden whom I saw? For she was kind as she was fair and would do no man an ill. Therefore if thou wilt lower thy veil, as thou didst on the day of thy departure, so that I may see, I will lift my hood so that thou mayst know that I lie not.'

"The princess replied: 'So will I, but upon one condition: should it be that thou art he upon whom thou sayst I looked with favor and yet he who also has committed these great crimes in my father's kingdom, know that thou mayst take thy pardon and thy gold and depart; but only upon the condition that never more wilt thou trouble either me or my father.'

"At this Abou shrank inwardly and a great sorrow fell upon him; for now, as at the death of Yussuf, he saw again the horror of his way. Sadly punished for his deeds, Abou promised, and when the torch was brought the princess lifted her veil. Then it was that Abou again saw the face upon which his soul had dwelt and which had caused him so much unrest. He was now so moved that he could not speak. He drew from his face its disguise and confronted her. And Yanee,

seeing for the second time the face of the youth upon whom her memory had dwelt these many days, her heart misgave her and she dared not speak. Instead she lowered her veil and sat in silence, the while Abou recounted the history of his troubled life and early youth; how he had been trained in evil ways; of how he came to rob the treasury, and how the deeds since of which the caliph complained had been in part due to his wish to defeat the skill of the caliph. At last the princess said: 'Go, and come no more, for I dare not look upon thee, and the caliph wishes thee only ill. Yet let me tell my father that thou wilt trouble him no more,' to which Abou replied: 'Know, O Princess, thus will I do.' Then opening the lattice, Yanee handed him the false pardon and the gold, which Abou would not take. Instead he seized and kissed her hand tenderly and then departed.

"Yanee returned to her father and recounted to him the story of the robbery of the treasury and all that followed, but added that she had not been able to obtain his hand in order to have him seized because he refused to reach for the gold. The caliph, once more chagrined by Abou's cleverness in obtaining his written pardon without being taken, now meditated anew on how he might be trapped. His daughter having described Abou as both young and handsome, the caliph thought that perhaps the bait of his daughter might win him to capture and now prepared the following and last pronunciamento, to wit:

" 'TO THE PEOPLE OF BAGHDAD

" 'Having been defeated in all our contests with *The One Whom the Caliph Seeks*, and yet having extended to him a full pardon signed by our own hand and to which has been affixed the caliphate seal, we now deign to declare that if this wisest of lawbreakers will now present himself in person before us and accept of us our homage and good will, we will, assuming him to be young and of agreeable manners, accept him as the affiant of our daughter. To this end we have ordered that the third day of the seventh moon be observed as a holiday, that a public feast be prepared and that our people assemble before us in our great court. Should this wisest of fugitives appear and declare himself we will there publicly reaffirm and do as is here written and accept him into our life and confidence. I have said it.

" 'YIANKO I.'

"The caliph showed this to his daughter and she sighed, for full well she knew that the caliph's plan would prove vain — for had not Abou said that he would return no more? But the caliph proceeded, thinking this would surely bring about Abou's capture.

"In the meantime in the land of Yemen, of which Abou was the rightful heir, many things had transpired. His father, Kar-Shem, having died and the wretched pretender, Bab-el-Bar, having failed after a revolution to attain to Kar-Shem's seat, con-

fessed to the adherents of Kar-Shem the story of the Prince Hussein's abduction and sale into slavery to a rug-merchant in Baghdad. In consequence, heralds and a royal party were at once sent forth to discover Hussein. They came to Baghdad and found the widow of Yussuf, who told them of the many slaves Yussuf had owned, among them a child named Hussein to whom they had given the name of Abou.

"And so, upon Abou's return from 'The Whispering Window,' there were awaiting him at the house of Mirza the representatives of his own kingdom, who, finding him young and handsome and talented, and being convinced by close questioning that he was really Hussein, he was apprised of his dignity and worth and honored as the successor of Kar-Shem in the name of the people of Yemen.

"And now Hussein (once Abou), finding himself thus ennobled, bethought him of the beautiful Yanee and her love for him and his undying love for her. Also he felt a desire to outwit the caliph in one more contest. To this end he ordered his present entourage to address the caliph as an embassy fresh from Yemen, saying that having long been in search of their prince they had now found him, and to request of him the courtesy of his good-will and present consideration for their lord. The caliph, who wished always to be at peace with all people, and especially those of Yemen, who were great and powerful, was most pleased at this and sent a company of courtiers to Hussein, who now dwelt with his entourage at one of the great caravanseries of the city, requesting that he come forthwith to the palace that he might be suitably entertained. And now Abou, visiting the caliph in his true figure, was received by him in great state, and many and long were the public celebrations ordered in his honor.

"Among these was the holiday proclaimed by Yianko in order to entrap Abou. And Yianko, wishing to amuse and entertain his guest, told him the full history of the great thief and of his bootless efforts thus far to take him. He admitted to Hussein his profound admiration for Abou's skill and ended by saying that should any one know how Abou might be taken he would be willing to give to that one a place in his council, or, supposing he were young and noble, the hand of his daughter. At this Hussein, enticed by the thought of so winning Yanee, declared that he himself would attempt to solve the mystery and now prepared to appear as a fierce robber, the while he ordered one of his followers to impersonate himself as prince for that day.

"The great day of the feast having arrived and criers having gone through the streets of the city announcing the feast and the offer of the caliph to Abou, there was much rejoicing. Long tables were set in the public square, and flags and banners were strung. The beautiful Yanee was told of her father's vow to Hussein, but she trusted in Abou and his word and his skill and so feared naught. At last, the multitude having

gathered and the caliph and his courtiers and the false Hussein having taken their places at the head of the feast, the caliph raised his hand for silence. The treasurer taking his place upon one of the steps leading to the royal board, reread the proclamation and called upon Abou to appear and before all the multitude receive the favor of the caliph or be forever banned. Abou, or Hussein, who in the guise of a fierce mountain outlaw had mingled with the crowd, now came forward and holding aloft the pardon of the caliph announced that he was indeed the thief and could prove it. Also, that as written he would exact of the caliph his daughter's hand. The caliph, astounded that one so uncouth and fierce-seeming should be so wise as the thief had proved or should ask of him his daughter's hand, was puzzled and anxious for a pretext on which he might be restrained. Yet with all the multitude before him and his word given, he scarce knew how to proceed or what to say. Then it was that Yanee, concealed behind a lattice, sent word to her father that this fierce soul was not the one who had come to her but an impostor. The caliph, now suspecting treachery and more mischief, ordered this seeming false Abou seized and bound, whereupon the fictitious Hussein, masquerading in Hussein's clothes, came forward and asked for the bandit's release for the reason that he was not a true bandit at all but the true prince, whom they had sought far and wide.

"Then the true Hussein, tiring of the jest and laying aside his bandit garb, took his place at the foot of the throne and proceeded to relate to Yianko the story of his life. At this the caliph, remembering his word and seeing in Abou, now that he was the Prince of Yemen, an entirely satisfactory husband for Yanee, had her brought forward. Whereupon the caliph declared that he would gladly accept so wise a prince, not only as his son by marriage but as his heir, and that at his death both he and Yanee were jointly to rule over his kingdom and their own. There followed scenes of great rejoicing among the people, and Hussein and Yanee rode together before them.

"And now, O my hearers," continued Gazzar most artfully, although his tale was done, "ye have heard how it was with Abou the unfortunate, who came through cleverness to nothing but good — a beautiful love, honor and wealth and the rule of two realms — whereas I, poor wanderer that I am —"

But the company, judging that he was about to plead for more anna, and feeling, and rightly, that for so thin a tale he had been paid enough and to spare, arose and as one man walked away. Gazzar counted his small store of anna and tucking his tambour into his rags, turned his steps wearily toward the mosque, where before eating it was, as the Koran commanded, that he must pray.

EQMM's publication one year and a half ago of "The Department of Impossible Crimes," by 15-year-old James Yaffe, was bound to cause repercussions. For one thing, your Editor anticipated that many high school English teachers would seize upon the story and exploit it as a practical lesson in contemporary composition; this expectation was realized. Then too, your Editor considered it inevitable that a baby deluge of manuscripts by teen-age writers would flood his study; this expectation was also realized.

Every manuscript in this fledgling torrent was carefully read, pondered over, and passed upon. Some of them deserved and received warm letters of encouragement from your Editor. One of them suffered the same fate as Master Yaffe's — it was accepted for publication. This manuscript was submitted by Ralph Norman Weber who courageously omitted any comment on his age; but even with his primitive knowledge of graphology, your Editor was able to make an accurate guess as to Master Weber's age — from the young man's handwriting on his stamped return-envelope.

Further correspondence brought to light that at the time of this writing Master Weber is 17 years old; that he has lived in as many towns as he's had birthdays (which is a high batting average even in the Nomad League); that he now resides in Oakland, California; that he works part-time for the Southern Pacific in Berkeley; and that even his best friends have told him he's too young to write professionally.

Too young? EQMM doesn't believe that anyone is too young — or too old — or too anything — to write successfully. If you think you have talent, if you have something to say, if you have the will and the patience and the consuming desire to be a detective-story writer, you'll find EQMM's editorial door always open — wide open.

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG

by RALPH NORMAN WEBER

SIRENS screamed as the police cars came hurtling down Market Street with yellow fog lights gleaming through the early morning San Francisco fog. The cars pulled up in front of the Commander Hotel. Policemen hurried through a small alley to guard the side and rear entrances.

Inspector Brownell, a tall bronzed man who had a reputation for solving murder cases with lightning speed, got out of his car and across the sidewalk like a quick shadow across the silver fog. Beside one of the big Chinese urns on either side of the door, he tripped over the harness of a Seeing Eye dog, obviously waiting for his master. The Inspector apologized; the dog blinked grave acceptance.

A small blond man came from behind the desk. "I'm the manager. My name's Hilton."

"Inspector Brownell. Where's your house detective?"

"With the marines somewhere, Inspector. And what with the war . . ."

"Yes, of course. Anything you can add to what you told me about Mrs. Winterton on the phone?"

"We-ell, I don't think I mentioned the safe in her room. She insisted on having one installed. Very eccentric."

"Unfortunate, perhaps," said the Inspector. "I'll go on up. The tenth floor, you said?"

"Yes. But I'm very sorry to tell you, Inspector, you'll either have to wait or walk up. The elevator's stuck."

"Anyone in it?"

"Yes, indeed. Three guests — Mr. Flynn, Mr. Crane and Mr. Hayden."

"I'll walk up. Will you phone me in her room when the repair man comes?"

"Certainly."

Violence just past was evident in Mrs. Winterton's apartment. A steamer trunk was open, its contents scattered. Books and papers littered the floor.

The victim was lying face down, her gray hair set trimly in a silver net. Blood stained her white linen gown.

"Must have been a small knife or dagger," the Inspector judged, examining the wound in her back.

Sergeant Riley came in to assist him. They turned to the open safe.

"But, Inspector," Riley exclaimed, "a lot of dough's still in there!"

"Yes. The killer wasn't after the money. He got the Winterton emerald. Quite a story about it — the last stone of a fabulous collection. She could have lived like a queen if she'd have been willing to sell it."

They searched for the weapon but found none. They checked for fingerprints but found only Mrs. Winterton's and the maid's. They examined letters and papers. At nine-thirty the Inspector looked at his watch.

"Haven't found a thing to work on here," he said. "We'd better get on."

They started down the long walk to the street floor. As they reached the second-floor landing, they heard the whirr of the elevator, and as they were running down the last flight, the clang of metal doors opening.

Mr. Hilton stood in their way at the bottom of the stairs.

"Too bad you started down too soon. I phoned but . . ."

Riley pushed him aside, while the Inspector sped after the guests who were running through the lobby.

"Oh, Inspector," Hilton called after him, "I'll vouch for them — defense workers, late for their bus."

Just outside, the Inspector found the front-door guard, Simpson, sprawling against the doorway, his head cut by the Chinese urn.

"The one in the tan coat knocked me over," Simpson offered feebly.

"That's him, going around the corner," Riley said.

"Take care of Simpson, Riley. I'll handle Mr. Tan-Coat."

The Inspector was around the corner like a cat, but again he stopped short.

The Seeing Eye dog was there. Inspector Brownell sidestepped it and looked down at the dog's master. The blind man was lying on the walk in front of him, a crumpled old man in a black coat, his white dim-out cane

with its red rubber tip clenched in his hand. The Inspector heard Riley's boots thundering close, so he turned to him.

"Did you see that cab pull away from the curb down the street there, as I came around the corner?" Riley asked. "He must've got away in that."

"Take care of the blind man, Riley," the Inspector said resignedly. "I'll radio Central Station after I check the time detail on that cab."

The blind man wasn't badly hurt. "A crazy man running in this fog," he complained, "knocked me down."

The Inspector looked at his watch, then ran full speed to where the cab had been half a block away. He noted the elapsed time. Then he stood there, watching the blind man and his dog start off, reach the corner, and stop.

It was quiet in the silvery fog — no sign of traffic. Suddenly, like a spurt of flame through gray embers, the solution to the case flashed through the Inspector's mind.

He strode grimly to the corner and tapped Riley's arm.

"Grab that blind man, Riley! Bring him into the hotel — he's our man."

Inside Hilton's office, Inspector Brownell stripped the blind man of his coat. It was a black-and-tan reversible. He showed them the loop under the armhole where the cane had hung.

"He merely turned the coat inside-out and threw himself down after he cleared that corner," the Inspector said. "Then the dog caught up with him." He brushed off the man's hat and dark glasses.

"Why, that's Mr. Flynn!" exclaimed Hilton.

"He's checking out," Riley said. "Where's the emerald, Inspector?"

"Here, I believe." The Inspector was removing the tip of the cane. "Blind men don't ordinarily use canes with rubber tips — they like metal or wood tips that they can *hear*."

He found the emerald inside, wrapped in a soft cloth. Then he unscrewed the handle and it proved to be a dagger that fitted neatly into the rest of the cane.

"You must've had something to work on," Riley said; "what was it?"

"I tripped over the Seeing Eye dog when I first came in. Then when I saw him again, around the corner, I knew he must have followed his master from the hotel door. It struck me as curious when I realized that whoever knocked the blind man down hadn't had enough time to get to the cab and escape in it. But the real clue hit me when I saw the supposed blind man stop for a red light before crossing the street."

"Seeing Eye dogs are trained to stop for red lights," the captured man argued.

"That's where you're wrong," said Inspector Brownell. "All dogs are color blind. Seeing Eye dogs are trained by *sound*. They listen to the traffic and cross the street when traffic stops. The street was clear when you and the dog stood waiting at the corner. The dog didn't know there was a red light — therefore *you* did!"

Miriam Allen deFord's first story for EQMM — "Mortmain" in the March 1944 issue — was a memorable one. Few readers will forget the harrowing picture conjured up in the last two paragraphs of that story — the blank-eyed, giggling nurse, handcuffed to the — but if you haven't read the story we won't spoil it for you.

In a way, therefore, you know what to expect. Or — do you?

Read Miss deFord's new story and then we'll compare notes. But read the story first . . .

SOMETHING TO DO WITH FIGURES

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

OUTSIDE was the California sunshine, but it did not penetrate to the little inside room where Wedderburn sat and thought — thought harder than ever before in his life.

His career for thirty years had been tied up with numbers, figures, arithmetical formulae. For twenty-seven of those years he had been bookkeeper — for thirteen years, head bookkeeper — in a wholesale drygoods house. He had never married. A little, thin, greying man with spectacles, he seemed the last person in the world to be intimately concerned with murder. And yet for a year past, most of his waking hours had been dedicated to solving the twisted story of Eric Scholl, of Lorina Brackett, and of her brother Willard.

Here he was, placed by fate or by accident, in a position where he alone of all human beings was *certain* that Lorina Brackett had been murdered, not by her brother who had been convicted and sentenced, but by young Eric Scholl, her next door neighbor in the Wyndham Hotel. Wedderburn himself had lived at the Wyndham for years; he knew everybody concerned. He was morally certain of Scholl's motive, his opportunity, and he could make a shrewd guess at the method and weapon. But to prove it to the satisfaction of the police, to exonerate Willard in the face of the seemingly incontrovertible evidence, to take Willard out of the death chamber and put Scholl into it — that had been a very different matter, and one in which Wedderburn, straining every nerve, had been unable to succeed.

"It has something to do with figures — I always get back to that," he had muttered to himself a thousand times. Perhaps it was natural that a man's mind should work that way when figures had made up most of his life. Figures meant time, for one thing, and time was of vital importance in the Brackett case. Lorina Brackett had come home to her room, No. 611, at about three o'clock on that fatal day. To her left was No. 610, her brother's room, with the common

bathroom between. To her right, the last room at the end of the hall, was Scholl's, No. 612. Originally all the rooms had formed a suite, and 611 and 612 still communicated by a door which led to Scholl's bathroom, and which was padlocked.

Scholl himself had been at home all afternoon, as usual; he was a shipyard worker on the graveyard shift, 4-F in the draft, but outwardly quite hale and sound. Willard had got home at precisely 5:18; his office was only four blocks away, which was the principal reason he had been a resident in a downtown hotel for so long. When his sister Lorina became a widow, she gave up her house and managed to get the room adjoining his, where she had lived ever since. Her brother could think of no valid objection, though he was not pleased. They had never been very good friends, and their constant quarrels, usually in shouted objurgations from one room to the other, through the two open bathroom doors between, were the common property of all the permanent guests on the sixth floor. Willard was not, perhaps, an admirable character; he was a fussy, persnickety man with fixed ways and a mean temper; nevertheless, Wedderburn thought, that was no reason he should be condemned to death for a murder he had not committed. Unfortunately, Wedderburn seemed to be the only person — except, presumably, Eric Scholl — who really believed in Willard's innocence; even his lawyer had given the impression of making the best of a bad case.

"I think he did it and I think it was a good job," seemed to be the consensus of opinion around the Wyndham. For if her brother had been considered a grouchy eccentric, Mrs. Brackett had been heartily disliked by everybody. She was, to be sure, fair, fat and forty. But her fairness was obviously synthetic; her fat was grotesque — she weighed over 200 pounds; and she seemed to have accumulated more bad manners, querulousness, curiosity, and selfishness than most people could have managed to collect in twice forty years. It was universally felt that the late Mr. Brackett had been most fortunate in having died to escape her, and the only wonder was how she had ever corralled a husband at all.

Eric Scholl had not been one of the many to complain to the manager from time to time of the noise from 610 and 611, chiefly for the reason that in the daytime, when he had to sleep, the rooms were empty, and usually he was out in the evening, before he was due at the shipyard at midnight. However, he had growled more than once about Mrs. Brackett's habit of keeping her door ajar whenever she was at home — "snooping on when everybody in the wing comes and goes" was Scholl's description — and whenever he was in his bathroom he could hear distinctly, through the wood of the locked door, every movement of Mrs. Brackett's heavy body and every word she exchanged with her brother or anyone else. On the

afternoon of the day she was murdered, he had wakened earlier than usual, and about four o'clock he had come down to the lobby and hung around, having nothing better to do, reading a newspaper and chatting occasionally with the desk clerk, the girl at the cigar stand, and occasional guests who were doing the same thing. The Wyndham was that kind of hotel.

When Willard came in, at exactly 5:18, he and Scholl exchanged the curtest of greetings. Scholl pointedly let him go up in the elevator, and then as soon as Harry, the operator, came down again, Scholl got in to return to his own room; it was quite apparent that he desired none of Willard's company even for the time it takes an elevator to go up six stories.

About five minutes later, the desk got a phone call from Scholl's room. He sounded excited.

"Say, listen," he said, "you'd better send somebody up here. There's something going on in 611. The old lady's been screaming fit to bust your ears."

"Aw, she's just having her regular fight with her brother," answered the clerk.

"No, honest, I haven't heard a peep out of him, and she was screaming bloody murder. You'd better see what's wrong, Johnson."

"Harry, take a run up to 611 and see what's eating Mrs. Brackett," the clerk ordered the elevator operator, who doubled as bell-boy. "If a bat's flown in her room or something, she'll be raising the roof."

The door of 611 was not ajar when Harry got there. It was closed, and when he knocked there was no answer. He tried knocking at 610, Willard's room, but there was no answer there, either. He went back to 611 and knocked again. The door of 612 opened, and Scholl came out.

"Gee, Harry," he said in a worried tone, "I really think something's happened in there. Mrs. Brackett was yelling her head off, and then all at once she stopped cold. And I haven't heard a word from Brother Willard. Better open up with your pass-key."

Harry looked dubious, but another knock and a call brought only silence. He reached for the key. Scholl was right on his heels as he entered the room.

Lorina Brackett was lying in the middle of the floor, her shapeless bulk bulging grotesquely. She was face down, and all around her, from her chin to her vast bosom, was a thick, dark pool of blood.

And standing over her, looking white and dazed and paralyzed, was her brother. His right hand was bloody. Clutched in it was the short, sharp, heavy knife he used for his hobby of wood-carving.

Well, that was the set-up. The police found it easy to reconstruct the crime. Willard had gone into his room, taken off his hat and overcoat, perhaps settled down to finish a wooden waste-basket on which he had been working, before it was time to go out to dinner. His sister had heard him come in — the two doors to their

bathroom were open — and doubtless had started at once to renew the bitter quarrel (the subject had been the disposition of their father's estate) which had been raging all the evening before, causing several annoyed calls to the desk from the sixth floor. Eric Scholl was not able to confirm this, since he had not been in his own bathroom but had been changing into his work clothes. The screams, however, he insisted, had come to him even through his closed bathroom door.

By the time Willard had recovered from his shock, he was in custody. The thing had gone through like clockwork. It was a pleasure to the police to get such an open-and-shut case. To his lawyer, when he got one, Willard had had nothing to offer in his own defense except to reiterate, in the irritated tone of one who does not like being contradicted: "I certainly didn't do it. I came home, and just as they say, I sat down for a spot of wood-carving before I went out again. I didn't hear Lorina moving about, and I thought that was funny, because she's practically always home when I get there. We were going to have dinner together, if she'd got over her mad from the night before. I hadn't seen her since; I suppose she was still asleep when I left in the morning.

"After a while I decided to find out if she was there. I guess it was only a minute or two at that; I know I'd just started to work on my carving. I got up, with the knife still in my hand, and went through the bathroom — no, the doors were closed till I opened them — and I remember that I called out, 'Are you there, Lorina?'

"The minute I stepped into her room, I saw her. For a second I couldn't move — I felt sick. My heart's not too good lately, anyway; I had to hold on to the door-frame. Then I went and stood over her.

"She looked just the way she did when the others found her. I began to shake all over, and the knife dropped from my hand, right into that — right into the blood.

"I don't know why I stooped and picked it up — just automatic, I guess. Anyway, I did; and right then that knocking began. I couldn't talk, I couldn't even think. When Harry opened the door, all I could do was just stand there. But I swear to God, Mr. Ellsworth," and Willard would turn to his skeptical lawyer and his voice would shake with his earnestness, "when I found her there wasn't a sign of a knife or whatever her throat had been cut with. Sure, there were no fingerprints except mine on my knife — I'm the only person who ever handled it. But that knife didn't kill her. I don't know what did, but whatever it was I didn't use it. She was dead when I found her."

The lethal weapon, wood-carving knife or not, had cut Lorina Brackett's jugular vein. It was venous blood that had been clotted in a pool around her.

"And she didn't scream — not while I was there," her brother would add, in all the long conferences he held with Ellsworth, the lawyer, in the

visitors' room of the city jail. "That's why I suspect Scholl — one reason. He made that up so he could get them up there to discover me behind two locked doors with Lorina's body. It was just a piece of luck for him that I was holding the knife, and double luck that it had dropped in — that it had dropped down there and I had picked it up again. I believe he deliberately waited down in the lobby till I got home and then followed me up so as to give me just enough time to have been able to — to do it.

"Just as a matter of common sense, Mr. Ellsworth, would any jury in the world think it was logical for a man to come home from the office, go to his room, and then march right in and cut his sister's throat? Do people do things like that — people who aren't crazy? And I'm not crazy, am I?"

"Of course not. But we've got to look at this from the outside, so to speak. You take the average man or woman on a jury. Of course they wouldn't think that any unpremeditated murder could take place that way. But they might think, a smart prosecutor could get them to think, that with this quarrel between you and all, you'd *planned* to do it just that way."

"Then why didn't I beat it — get out before anybody discovered it — make a getaway? If I'd planned it, wouldn't I have my things all packed to get going the minute it was over?"

"They'd be told — I'm afraid I might as well put it that they *will* be told — that when it came to the point the excitement, with your bad heart and all, was too much for you; that you were caught before you could finish your plan."

"But look, Mr. Ellsworth, however he worked it, I'm sure it was Scholl who committed that murder. I don't know how he did it, though I can work it out. But I know why."

"Why, then?"

"Lorina told me herself. You know, I kind of hate to say things like this about the dead, and about my own sister too. If I weren't in this fix I'd have kept it to myself forever. Lorina and I weren't ever fond of each other, even when we were kids, and we fought a lot over some fool ideas she had about how I'd handled the money our dad left us, but I'm ashamed to tell some of the things she wasn't ashamed to tell me about herself.

"Sure we quarreled lots, but not all the time. There were times — when I didn't oppose her or answer her back — when we were friendly enough. And it was about a week before all this happened that she told me about it. She was proud of herself — she said she was just being patriotic. Being a sneak-thief and a snooper was what I'd call it.

"You know the door between her room and Scholl's was supposed to be permanently padlocked. Lorina discovered she could open it and lock it again and he'd be none the wiser. She had too much time on her hands and too much curiosity, the way I look at it. Anyway, she told me whenever I was away and she knew that Scholl

was out — she used to keep her door ajar, you know, and watch when everybody went by — she'd let herself into his room and snoop around.

"I don't mean she'd ever take money, or anything like that. Even Lorina wasn't that low. What ailed her was her curiosity. She'd read the man's private letters, for example; I guess it gave her a feeling of power to know, for instance, that he was having a hot affair with some girl when he didn't dream she had ever heard of it.

"Well, one evening she was rummaging around in his bureau drawers and she came across this bottle of pills and this letter. He's 4-F, you know — says he has something wrong with his insides, bad enough to keep him from fighting but not from welding.

"Maybe you've read about this fellow they picked up, who was selling draft inductees some stuff that was supposed to give them palpitations and affect their sight and I don't know what all, so they couldn't pass their physical examinations. Well, what Lorina found was evidently some of this medicine and a letter — it wasn't signed — telling how to take it and what the results would be. I don't know why he kept the letter, unless he couldn't remember without it what dose to take, and when, and thought he might be called again some time and need it.

"Anyway, Lorina fished it and the bottle out from under his socks or something and took them away with her. She told me all about it, and she said she was going to turn Scholl in and use them for evidence.

"I'd have been for it — I have no more use than anyone else for a draft dodger — except that how could she go about it without confessing the way she'd got them? And then I wasn't any too sure she couldn't be had up for burglary; and I wasn't keen to have a scandal like that involving my own sister. I'd probably have lost my good job, for one thing.

"So I put the fear of God into her on that score, and I talked her out of it. The next was, she was going to send the stuff to the proper authorities with an anonymous letter. Since she'd already done what she had, that seemed to me to be the best solution. At first the idea pleased her—she'd get Scholl into trouble, and have the consciousness that she'd been the one who did it, but nobody could accuse her of it.

"But when I asked her a few days later if she'd done it, she said no. She said she had another idea. And about then she started harping on dad's money again, and the other subject never came up again."

"Then what do you think happened?" Ellsworth asked.

"The way I figure it out is this. Lorina was awfully close with money. I think she worked out a scheme to blackmail Scholl."

"There's no evidence of that."

"No, because I don't think she'd got to the point yet. I think she was holding those things while she perfected the details of it. Mr. Ellsworth, I wasn't there, but I'm morally cer-

tain that this is what actually occurred. I think Scholl woke up early that afternoon, and for some reason happened to think of the bottle and the letter. He looked where he'd hidden them and they were gone.

"Or maybe it happened another way. Maybe Lorina hadn't relocked that door properly the last time she'd been in his room, and maybe he was in the bathroom and noticed it. He disliked Lorina anyway, you know, and if he saw something funny about that lock he'd guess right away who had done it, and why. Then he'd naturally begin looking over his things to see if anything was missing or disarranged, and of course the first thing he'd think of would be the things he ought to have had sense enough to destroy. When he found they were gone, he'd be crazy mad and scared at the same time. His impulse would be to confront Lorina at once. If the door between their rooms was unlocked, he'd go in that way — she was practically always there in the afternoon. If it wasn't, then her door was always ajar, and he could lock it afterwards and go back by opening the bathroom door the way she did.

"Suppose he was shaving, getting ready to go out, when he noticed the lock. Nothing more natural than that he'd start hunting around to see if anything was wrong, while he still held the razor in his hand — look at the way I went in, myself, still holding the knife I'd been working with.

"Then, if I know Lorina, she might have been startled for a second, but she'd face him down. She'd say, yes, she'd taken the things and that she meant to turn him in, and how about it? She might even think that was an auspicious minute to try to sell the things back to him.

"Well, the rest is easy. She'd refuse to give him back his things, or suggest that if he wanted them badly enough he could pay for them — and Scholl would lose his head. He'd draw back to strike her, and then he'd realize he had a razor in his hand. Lorina'd throw back her head to scream — that's probably where he got that idea from — about her screaming. You give a hard edgewise blow at the right place with a sharp safety razor, and that's that.

"Mr. Ellsworth, that's what must have happened. Eric Scholl ought to be here, not me. You tell them what I've told you, and get me out of here."

Ellsworth tried, of course, but he was not convinced. His private belief was that Willard had murdered his sister, and that as his only way of extricating himself he had made up the rest. *If* Scholl had discovered his loss, *if* he had had a razor, things might very well have happened in just that way: only, Ellsworth thought, Lorina Brackett's brother *had* got there first, with a wood-carving knife.

However, Scholl was thoroughly investigated and questioned. There were points that confirmed the brother's story. The door between the rooms had been tampered with. The

bottle and the letter were not found. If Willard was right, Scholl, after the murder, could have locked the door and hunted until he found them, and then destroyed them. Then he could have returned to his own room, washed his hands and the razor, dressed, and gone down to the lobby until Willard arrived, between 5:15 and 5:20, as always. Scholl, naturally, denied the whole story. His draft records were looked up, and it was true that he had been rejected because of an eye condition, but when he was re-examined by the police doctor his eyes were found still to be bad. He might perhaps have secured some of that medicine somehow, but there was no way of proving it.

That was the trouble with the whole situation. Nothing could be proved, and without proof Willard had no adequate defense. Scholl was not held, the case came to trial, and though Ellsworth tried conscientiously, he had nothing to offer except Willard's flat denial. He made as much as he could of the time factor, but unfortunately he could get nowhere. The body had still been warm when Harry and Scholl burst in; but Lorina Brackett had been a very heavy woman, and fat corpses stay warm longer than thin ones. The blood had coagulated, but blood begins to coagulate as soon as shed, and blood from the veins, which flows out instead of jetting like arterial blood, probably coagulates that much faster. It was Mrs. Brackett's jugular vein which had been cut.

So Lorina Brackett might have been dead only two minutes when found, or she might have been dead for two hours. Ellsworth had hoped that the uncertainty of so many points, and the fact that all the evidence against his client was circumstantial, might at least gain for him a manslaughter verdict. But there is no accounting for juries. Willard had been indicted on a first-degree murder charge, and it was of first-degree murder that he was convicted, with no recommendation for mercy. The judge had no alternative but to sentence him to death. An appeal for a new trial was denied, and the date of his execution was set. Twice he was reprieved by the governor, on Ellsworth's representation that new evidence was about to be revealed, but when the new evidence did not appear, further reprieve was denied.

It was at this point that Wedderburn began to be haunted by the thought that somehow Willard could be saved if only some point not obvious or hitherto brought out could be revealed — that some such point existed which would clear the condemned man and by implication involve Eric Scholl. Somewhere back in his subconscious mind the thought persisted, "It has something to do with figures."

And now suddenly, as he sat absorbed in the ramifications of the case, a spring was released. Something he had read or heard long ago jumped to the surface of his mind. It was the key to the whole thing, the solution he

had sought so long.

The "figure" which had haunted him was not a number, not a matter of time elapsed, or any phase of the arithmetic which was his second being. Suddenly he saw in his mind's eye the body of Lorina Brackett, lying on the floor of her hotel room — as numerous awed and horrified residents of the sixth floor of the Wyndham had seen it fleetingly through the open door before the police arrived. He saw the grotesque bulges, the spreading obesity — in a word, the "figure" of the dead woman lying, fat arms thrust out, fat legs collapsed from her fall, her hair sticky from the pool of blood around her throat.

He recalled that she had lain *face downward* on the floor.

And now he recalled that odd, out-of-the-way fact. If a man dies suddenly from loss of blood he is nearly always found on his back. If a man bleeds to death gradually he will almost invariably be found with his *face towards the floor.*

Lorina Brackett lay face downward — so she had bled to death gradually. If her brother, who had gone upstairs *only a few minutes before,* had killed her, she would — 999,999 chances out of a million — have been found on her back. If Eric Scholl had killed her, between three and four o'clock, she would normally have been discovered just as she was discovered — face down.

In that one point, neglected and forgotten by everybody until Wedderburn suddenly stumbled upon it, lay the one chance for holding up Willard's execution and making another attempt to fasten the crime on Scholl.

But it was too late. Even as Wedderburn started at the sudden revelation, the cyanide tablets were being dropped into the pail of water. Almost instantly the poisonous gas spread through the death chamber, and the man within it strained against the straps which held him to his chair.

Fourteen minutes later the prison physician pronounced Willard Wedderburn dead.

Editor's Note: If you anticipated Miss deFord's surprise ending, chalk up a large point for your side. Your Editor confesses that he was completely taken aback by the revelation in the last sentence — in the full name *that immediately precedes the final word of the story. If you were fooled as neatly and unexpectedly as your Editor was, don't blame it on "unfairness to the reader." At no stage did Miss deFord violate the canon of fair play. As early as the first sentence of the third paragraph, the author revealed the whole "trick" of the story — go back and reread that sentence in the light of what you know now. True, Miss deFord has deliberately and with malice aforethought tried to mislead you. But all's fair in love, war, and detective stories, and if you read the story again, you'll find that strictly speaking, Miss deFord always told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Brava to Miss deFord for a remarkable performance in literary legerdemain!*

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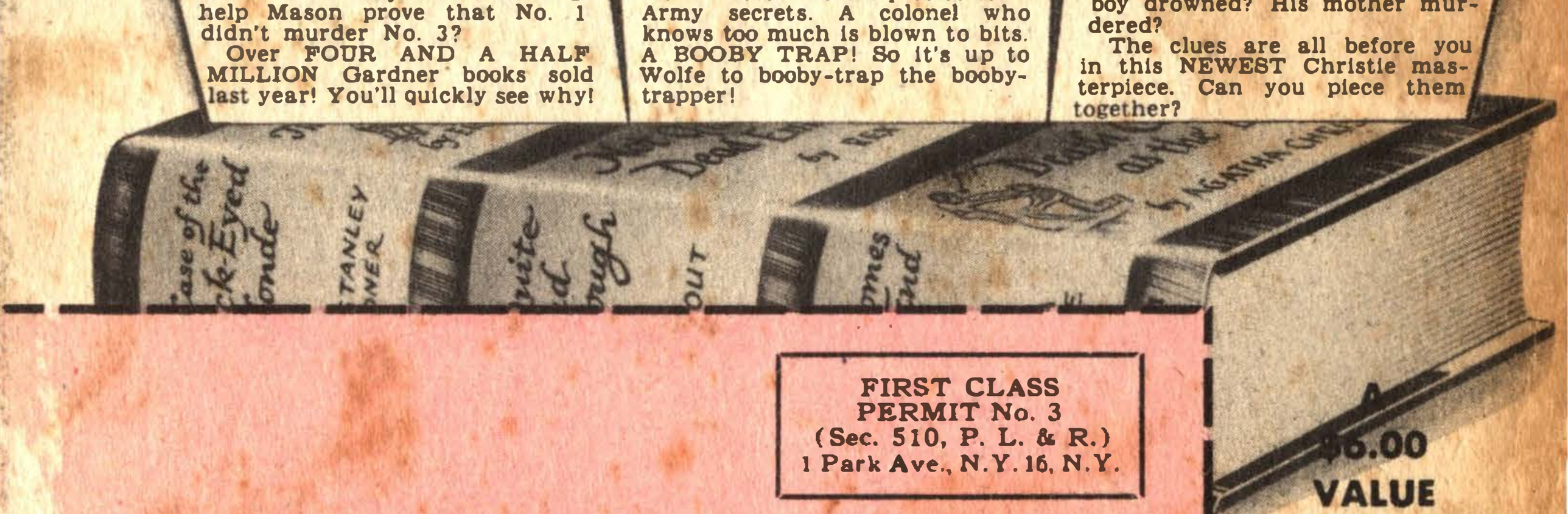

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